

No 660.

JAN, 25th 1911.

5 Cents.

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

MY BROTHER JACK

By ALLAN ARNOLD.



"Stop!" cried Jack, in a voice of command as he sprang into the room. Seizing the torch from the hole in the table, he struck at the two men with it, dealing one a blow full across the head.

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER. 24 UNION SQUARE, NEW-YORK.

PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, November 7, 1898. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1911 in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Tousey, Publisher, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 660.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 25, 1911.

PRICE, 5 CENTS.

My Brother Jack

OR,

The Lazy One of the Family

By ALLAN ARNOLD

CHAPTER I.

SOME DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

As the full story of my brother Jack's adventures does not at times show me in a very flattering light, and as the recital of some of the things I have done with regard to Jack do not reflect the greatest credit to me, I have decided to say very little about myself, but to simply tell about my brother Jack, who was regarded by myself and others as the lazy one of the family until—well, until our eyes were opened to his true worth. I will therefore leave my own identity concealed, while at the same time I shall not spare myself by leaving untold any of the mean things I may have done to Jack, although he has long ago forgiven, if he has not forgotten them.

* * * * *

"I don't see what we are going to do," said Mrs. Foster, sitting at the head of the breakfast table. "It is going to cost a good deal to support the family, and our income is so much smaller than I supposed it would be."

"We might sell the house," said Susie. "It is really bigger than we need. Father must have expected that we were all going to marry and live here with him."

"We can't sell it," said Phil, "where would we move to? We couldn't afford to buy even a little house where we would want to live, so we'll have to stay in this unfashionable neighborhood."

"I might go into a store and earn something," said Edith.

"Romantic rubbish!" said Phil. "The idea of a Foster going into a store! In the first place you couldn't earn more than two dollars a week, and besides all our friends would cut us if they knew it."

"I'd like to be a cash boy," said Billy, the youngest of Mrs. Foster's children, a boy of ten years. "They have lots of fun."

"Small boys' opinions are not asked for," said Susie, who was seventeen and considered herself quite an important person. "I hope none of our family will ever have to work in a store."

"Something will have to be done and soon," said Mrs. Foster.

"You will have to give up college, Philip, and Susie cannot go to Vassar. Tom and Billy can go to a public school."

"I don't want to go to a public school," said Tom, a boy of fifteen. "Only decent fellows go to private. Nobody'd speak to me if I went to a public school. I'd sooner go into an office."

"That's better than a store, at all events," said Susie. "He might do that, I suppose. There's no disgrace in being in an office."

"You can't go into an office," said Phil. "You must finish your education first."

"But, Philip, I can't send him to Professor Lockwood's. It is too expensive. I really don't see what I am going to do with this large family and this big house."

"You might keep boarders and let the girls help you," said Jack, from a corner by the window where he sat reading.

No one had paid any attention to him—no one had asked his opinion, and until now he had given none.

Jack was seventeen, being Susie's twin, and was fair, slight, somewhat round-shouldered, and wore glasses.

At once a general protest arose at what was considered the weakest proposition of any yet made.

"Keep boarders, indeed!" said Susie. "Why, we'd lose more caste than we've already lost from living where we do."

The smaller children all declared that they wouldn't be servants to anyone, and Tom said that Jack had no style.

"Much you'd help, anyhow," said Phil, scornfully. "Everybody calls you the lazy one of the family, and so you are. You don't do anything but sit and read all day or write rubbishy stuff that's only fit for silly school girls to read. If you want to help mother you'd better go to work instead of wasting your time reading."

"I think I will," said Jack, quietly.

"I'll believe you when I see you," said Phil. "You're too lazy to work."

"Yes, you make me shovel off the snow and put in the coal and everything," said Tom, "and you just sit and read."

"The idea of keeping a boarding-house," said Phil. "I thought you had more spirit."

They all had something to say against the unfortunate boy except Mrs. Foster, but Jack had settled down into his book

again and seemed not to hear the discussion, much less be affected by it.

Mrs. Foster had recently been left a widow with a family of six children to bring up, and the question of how to properly support and educate them was an urgent one.

Mr. Foster had always been supposed to be rich, but after his death it was found that one unfortunate investment and another, together with the great depreciation of certain stocks he possessed, had quite eaten up his property, so that when affairs were finally settled, all that the family had was their house and an income of a few hundred a year.

The house had once been in a very fashionable quarter of a large manufacturing town, but fashion had taken up her abode in another section, and the house could be sold only at a figure much less than its actual value at the time it was built.

Jack Foster was the second son, his brother Philip, a young man of eighteen, being the eldest of a family of six, and a person of some consequence in his own regard, being proficient in all athletic sports, the head of his class in the high school, and about to enter college on a high standing.

As Phil had said, Jack was regarded as the lazy one of the family, not only by the family itself, but by friends and neighbors and those who had but the slightest acquaintance with it.

Jack was studious and thoughtful, stood fairly well in his classes and was generally liked, although he took no part in the games, made few or no close friends, and seemed unusually sly and reserved.

While his health seemed in no way impaired, he had a rather delicate look, and, having to wear glasses and stooping slightly from reading so much, he gave one the impression of being an invalid, while those who knew better about him jumped to the conclusion that he was lazy, and said as much.

Certainly he did not do things about the house which he might have done, he did not ride a wheel or indulge in athletic sports, and when he took walks he was very leisurely about it, and spent more time sitting under trees than on the road, all of which was used as evidence that he was lazy, and, as he did not deny it, the name Philip had given him stuck to him.

Breakfast being over, one and another of the family left the room till only the two older brothers remained.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you lazy, good-for-nothing tramp, to propose that we keep boarders. My mother is a lady, a fact which you seem to have forgotten."

It was Philip who said this, and he looked very indignant as he towered above the slight figure of his younger brother, still seated by the window.

Jack made no answer, and this seemed to irritate the other more than an angry retort, for he continued violently:

"You're even too lazy to get mad. You've no spirit, no spunk, no feeling of shame, no pride, no ambition. You'll simply be satisfied to loaf about and let us support you. I'm ashamed of you, for you're no good."

"I wish you wouldn't make so much noise tramping about like that, old chap," said Jack quietly. "I really don't know what I'm reading."

"Bah! You're too lazy to live," stormed Philip. "You ain't worth wasting words on. All you're good for is the poorhouse, and you'll get there fast enough, I'll be bound."

Then he flung himself out of the room, shutting the door with a clatter that made everyone else in the house jump, but had no more apparent effect on Jack than if a leaf had fallen.

He sat by the window a long time, but he did not read, the book lying closed in his lap.

He was certainly thinking deeply, for when Tom came in with a shout and went out again upsetting a chair, he seemed not to have noticed him.

Finally he went out and was not seen again till supper time, seeming to be somewhat fatigued but saying nothing whatever.

The next day he breakfasted before the others and was not seen till evening, the same thing occurring the day following.

On the third day he had his early breakfast as before, but was nowhere to be seen.

"I wonder where Jack can be?" said his mother. "This is the third day he has gone off so mysteriously. What can he be doing?"

"Hunting a job," said Tom, sententiously.

"Not him!" sneered Phil. "He is more likely loafing in the woods reading or writing poetry."

Tom was nearer the truth than Phil, however, for Jack actually had a job, instead of being in search of one.

That forenoon Tom was on the outskirts of the town near the mill district, where a new building was in course of construction, and being curious, like all boys of his age, he went up to watch the men at work.

The bricks and mortar were being carried to the upper stories by an endless chain worked by steam, but to feed this a line of men carrying hods walked up an incline leading from the ground to the first floor, where they put their full hods on the chain and received empty ones for them.

The work was not as hard as if the men had been obliged to climb ladders to the fifth or sixth story, but it was hard enough.

As Tom stood watching, the men came down the incline on their way to the brick and mortar piles, where their hods were replenished.

On the end of the line was a slight, boyish figure, somewhat stoop-shouldered, dressed in old clothes rather too small for him, carrying an empty hod.

Tom stared for a moment, and then as the boy was about to pass, seized his arms.

"Jack!"

"Hallo, Tom! What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing, you mean?"

"Working. Let go, Tom; I've got to get my load."

"But, Jack, this isn't a gentleman's work, carrying bricks."

"A gentleman may work at anything that is honorable, Tom."

Jack was without his glasses, and Tom thought his eyes had never had so much fire in them as now.

"But, Jack, you ain't strong enough for it. You'll kill yourself. Here, let me do it."

"Thank you, Tom, but I'm all right. I've stood it two days, and the boss isn't too hard on me."

"But what'll Phil say?"

"You won't tell him," said Jack, and then he hurried on, received his load of bricks, and toiled up the incline with it.

When he came down, Tom once more urged him to desist.

"Can't do it, my boy," he said. "It'll be noon soon, and work will be over. Run home to dinner like a good chap, and say nothing about it."

"Then you're bound to keep it up?"

"Yes. Mother needs the money."

The next time Jack came down the incline, Tom said to him:

"Brother Jack, you're a tramp. I'm sorry I spoke as I did the other day. If I had a place, I'd go to work, too."

"I'll find you one," said Jack, "but not at this sort of work."

Dinner was quite over when Jack came in, looking much as usual, went up to his mother, kissed her, and put five dollars in small bills in her lap.

"That's for you," he said.

"But, Jack, where did you get it?"

"Earned it," said Jack, giving Tom a look of warning.

CHAPTER II.

A SERIOUS ENCOUNTER.

"Are you still of a mind to go to work, Tom?" asked Jack, putting his head into his brother's room when he had finished his dinner.

"Yes, but it's Saturday afternoon."

"That makes no difference. You come with me and I'll get you a job."

"Where is it? In an office?"

"You don't object to a bank?"

"No. That'll be fine sport."

"Come along then."

"But you ain't going back to carrying bricks?"

"Not to-day," said Jack. "I'm not quite sure what I'll do next week. It's rather harder work than I'm used to."

"Phil says you never work," said Tom.

"Don't tell tales out of school, young fellow," said Jack, quietly. "Phil is your older brother and you musn't say mean things about him."

Tom said no more and the two boys presently left the house together and walked toward the business part of the town.

Tom was quite as tall and even heavier than Jack, so that one would easily have taken him to be the elder and have imagined that the robust, healthy-looking, rosy-cheeked, curly-headed boy was taking the fair, delicate-looking boy with the glasses for a walk, instead of looking to him for a position.

"How did you get the other job, Jack?" asked Tom, suddenly.

"Put on my old clothes, took off my glasses, and asked for it."

"And how are you going to get this job for me?"

"By asking for it," said Jack, simply, and that was all he would say.

On the main street of the town he suddenly stopped, asked Tom to wait a few moments and then dove into an office a few yards away.

"Why, that's the Advertiser office," muttered Tom, "and he said it was a bank. I wonder if he's changed his mind? Well, I don't care much."

Jack came out at the end of five minutes, beckoned to Tom and said:

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Now we'll go to the bank."

"Will it be open on Saturday afternoon?"

"To me, yes," answered Jack, an answer that greatly puzzled Tom.

They found the bank building still open, and although no business was being done in the bank itself, Jack knocked at one of the private offices connected with it and was readily admitted.

"This is my brother Tom, of whom I spoke the other day, Mr. Evans," said Jack, addressing a pleasant-faced gentleman of middle age. "I think he will do for the place, but you'd better ask him a few questions."

"He is younger than you? Why, he looks older, if anything."

"Tom is fifteen and has a better head for figures than I have, and he prefers business to a profession. I'll be responsible for him, and you know his father well enough to trust his son, I think."

"I'll trust you both on that recommendation," said Mr. Evans, with a hearty laugh. "Now, my lad," to Tom, "let us see how much you know about business. I could not very well take your brother when he applied to me the other day on account of his age and lack of business knowledge, but he spoke of you, and I think we may come to terms."

The examination was so satisfactory that Mr. Evans, who was the cashier, agreed to employ Tom Foster as a junior clerk at a salary of five dollars a week, to begin on Monday following, with a promise of advancement as the boy proved himself capable.

"Tell your mother you've got a job, Tom," said Jack, when they were on the street again, "and stick to your work like a man. Remember, I am responsible for your good conduct. I should hate to be disappointed in you, old chap."

"You talk to a fellow as if you had some respect for him and not as if he was no good," said Tom. "Phil, now, abuses me and tries to make out I'm only fit to run on his errands."

"Never mind about Phil," said Jack, taking off and wiping his glasses. "I told you just now you were not to talk against him. Run home and tell your mother you're going to begin work at the bank on Monday. I've got two or three other places to go to and won't be home till supper time."

"But you look tired, Jack. I'm afraid that work was too hard for you."

"Perhaps it was," said Jack, and then he walked away, leaving Tom standing in the middle of the street.

He crossed several streets and finally turned into an alley and was about to enter a door on which there was a rusty tin sign, bearing the words "Banner Editorial Rooms," when he was suddenly confronted by a strange-looking creature who began to laugh immoderately at him.

The figure was scarcely more than four feet in height, its legs were short, and its arms long, so that but for its head and face it would have been difficult to decide whether it were man or boy.

Its head was big and round while the face was partly covered by a thick, short red beard, showing that the creature was a man about thirty.

He was, in fact, a dwarf, and a hideous one at that.

He was not misshapen, except as to the shortness of his legs and the extreme length of his arms, but his face was crafty and cruel, while at the same time it showed a deficient intellect.

The beard was neither regular nor well kept, but grew in patches on his face, being quite long in some places and short in others; he had beetling eyebrows, small, bead-like eyes, set very close together, a short, turned-up nose and a big mouth, which, when he laughed, displayed a few stumpy teeth and two long, sharp ones, which were more like fangs than human teeth.

Jack had seen the uncanny creature before, but had never spoken to him, so that he was now rather annoyed at being thus stopped and made the subject of the dwarf's mirth.

He attempted to pass, so as to enter the door with the sign on it, when the dwarf, with great agility, placed himself directly in front of him, laughed immoderately for a few moments, and then said:

"Ho, ho, ho! we're well met, the pair of us—two lazy, good-for-nothing fellows. Lazy Jim, the dwarf, and lazy Jack Foster, the rich man's son."

"What do you want, Jim?" asked Jack, resolving not to show anger or disgust. "Do you want money?"

"Lazy Jim and Lazy Jack! Ho, ho, ho! two of a kind. That's awful good!" chuckled the dwarf, leering at the boy and showing those dreadful fangs of his. "Money! He, he, he! Where will you get it? You're too lazy to even beg for it, like I do. You're the lazy one of the family, just like me! He, he, he! Give me money, indeed!"

"Step aside, Jim, like a good fellow, and let me pass," said Jack, quietly. "I have business here."

The dwarf laughed, less boisterously than before, reached out one long, sinuous arm, caught Jack's wrist, stretched his neck till his hideous face was close to Jack's and hissed:

"Do you know why you are poor when everybody thought you were rich? Do you know why so little money was found when your father died? Do you know how your father made his money?"

"He was in a financial business."

"Ho, ho, ho, that's what you think, but if you were not so lazy you'd find out. Too lazy to think, people say."

"People don't always know what they are talking about," said Jack, with the slightest tone of impatience. "Come, Jim, let me go. I want to see the people up-stairs; I have work to do."

"Let 'em think you're lazy," chuckled the dwarf, "but get to work. Carrying bricks isn't fit work for you. Write things for people to read and wake up. Ho, ho, ho, yes, wake up."

"Is that all?" asked Jack, quietly and patiently.

"Yes, wake up. Find out how your father made his money, and your family won't be so proud. Go to the brown hut on Bald Head at midnight and find out. Ho, ho, ho! good-by!"

The dwarf suddenly released Jack's arm, rolled down the steps, sprang up again with incredible agility and darted off so swiftly that Jack was unable to see where he went.

"Go to the brown hut on Bald Head and learn how my father made his money?" he repeated. "What mystery is this, and what does this hideous creature know about it? Lazy Jim is the idlest, most disreputable fellow in town, only half-witted, they say, and nearly always drunk. Well, perhaps they are just as mistaken in him as they are in me. Time will show, no doubt."

He entered the building, made his way to the top and entered a small, dimly lighted room, where an old man in his shirt sleeves and wearing baggy trousers, slippers and a green shade over his eyes, sat at a desk littered with newspapers and sheets of paper of all sizes.

"That story of yours is all right," he said sharply, as he looked up, "but I don't feel as if I could pay you for it when I can select all the stories I want out of my exchanges."

"I can't give you the story any more than you can give away your paper," said Jack modestly.

"No, I suppose not," said the other, glaring at the boy from under the green shade. "Your style is smooth, though, and your choice of language is good. How are you on editorials? I must have 'em, but I can't write 'em. I'm a better printer than an editorial writer. I had a minister write 'em for me, but he wasn't sharp enough. I want something stinging on the political situation—something that hits both sides. The Banner is an independent paper, you know."

"How much would you want, Mr. Barnes?"

"About a column."

"And the rates?"

"Ten dollars a column for editorials, six for news."

"Very well, I'll do it now. Have you got an extra chair?"

"Take mine. I don't want to disturb the papers on the other and I'm afraid it wouldn't hold you, either. Sit right here. I'll go down and see how they're getting on. Ring the bell when you're ready."

In something more than an hour's time Jack pulled the bell handle near the desk, and the editor presently came up.

Jack handed him several sheets of coarse, bluish-white paper, which he read over carefully, saying nothing till he had reached the bottom of the last sheet.

"Good!" he snapped in his quick, nervous way. "Just the thing I want. I'll have it set up at once. That'll be something for 'em to think over to-night and to-morrow. That'll make the Banner read, if anything will. Can you give me another next week?"

"Yes. How about my money?"

"H'm! You're business from head to heels, ain't you? Most writers ain't. Well, I can't object. I'll write you an order on the cashier. Don't forget next week, will you?"

"No. I'll be in early. Much obliged. Good-by. If you don't use the story I'll take it somewhere else."

He got his order called at the office down stairs, put the money in his pocket and went on, stopping at a third news-

paper office for a short time, and then taking the direction toward home.

He was passing a tumble-down building on a side street, when the dwarf suddenly sprang out, seized him by the wrist, and said:

"Remember, midnight at the brown hut on Bald Head. Then let 'em call you the lazy one if they like."

The man was gone in an instant, and Jack hurried on, greatly disturbed.

"What can he mean?" he thought. "Everybody knows that my father made his money in business. Why should I go to a secret place like this at the dead of night, to learn what I already know? I ought not to give the idea a second thought."

He could not drive the matter out of his thoughts, however, for it would come up every now and then, whether he were reading, trying to write, or simply talking on ordinary topics.

He went up to his room shortly after nine o'clock, feeling a need of rest, but he could not sleep, and finally at something after ten he arose, dressed himself, crept softly down-stairs, muttering:

"It's ten good miles to Bald Head Mountain, but if it were a hundred I'd go, for I can't endure this mystery another moment."

CHAPTER III.

THE BROWN HUT ON BALD HEAD.

Making his way down-stairs in the dark cautiously and noiselessly so as not to disturb any of the family, everyone having retired, Jack at last found himself in the lower front hall where his brother Tom kept his bicycle.

Although Jack had no wheel of his own and did not habitually ride one, he knew how to do so, and he now intended to use Tom's in making the journey to Bald Head Mountain, ten miles distant.

The town lay between two ranges of hills on the banks of a river of considerable size, and Bald Head was the highest and most distant of these hills.

It was on the same side of the river as the town itself, and at its base was a straggling village, inhabited by squatters, hunters, a few laborers and a sprinkling of men who had no avowed avocation, but worked now and then at long intervals at whatever they could find to do.

The village had rather an unsavory name, and the region around it, particularly the mountain itself, was so wild and uncultivated that it seemed impossible for anyone to make a living in it, and indeed, the general character of the dwellings in the neighborhood would seem to show that very few did.

Bald Head was high enough to be called a mountain, and was thickly wooded at a point half-way to the top, its summit, however, being entirely bare of anything except the scantiest vegetation, and hence its name.

The road from the town where Jack lived to the foot of the mountain was fairly good, and passably so up to the belt of woods, but beyond that it was difficult and at times hard to find, being only fit for pedestrians, and sure-footed ones at that.

Listening for any sound that might indicate that any of the family were stirring, and hearing none, Jack lighted the lamp on the fork of the wheel, just under the handlebar, opened the door carefully, made his way to the street, quickly mounted and rode at a good pace toward Bald Head.

He wore a tight-fitting cap pulled well down over his eyes, and had on bicycle breeches and stockings, so that there was nothing to impede his progress, which at this hour, the streets being deserted, ought to be rapid.

He took the sidewalk and made good speed when, as he

was nearing the outskirts of the town, he was surprised to see a lady riding a wheel suddenly come out just ahead of him, from an intersecting street.

There was a street lamp on the corner, and by its light Jack easily recognized the rider as Kitty Elliott, the daughter of Ezra Elliott, a retired judge and the foremost citizen of the town.

"Why, how do you do, Kitty?" he said, riding alongside the girl. "Taking a spin? Really, this is an unexpected pleasure."

Jack was quite fond of Miss Kitty, and she had always shown more or less of a liking for him, although she had frequently twitted him with being lazy, as most everyone did.

"Yes, I thought I would," she said, not in the pleasantest tones. "Do you ride a wheel? I thought you too lazy to indulge in any exercise. I didn't even know you had one."

"The wheel is Tom's, but I thought I'd borrow it."

"Oh, then, you don't ride very well?" and Kitty put on a spurt.

"Oh well, yes, well enough when I like," said Jack, keeping alongside. "Where were you going? I should like to keep you company."

"I don't think I shall go any farther," was the quiet retort. "My lamp has gone out, the moon is going under a cloud and it's getting late."

"I'll see you home, if you like," said Jack, simply.

"Oh, no, I won't trouble you to do that," answered Kitty, and then she suddenly dashed ahead, darted down a narrow street and disappeared.

"That's funny," mused Jack. "It looks as if she wanted to get rid of me. Her lamp wasn't lighted when I met her, and I couldn't smell any smoke as if it had just gone out. I wonder why she said that?"

As Kitty had said, the moon, which had been shining quite brilliantly when Jack had started out, was now obscured by clouds, and the road, where there were trees, was very dark.

Jack rode on, still musing over the girl's strange conduct, although that soon gave way to the subject of his mysterious mission, his mind being busy with conjectures as to whether he were not bound on a wild-goose chase, and whether he would not find that he had taken all this trouble for nothing.

He had ridden about half a mile, when suddenly a rider came scorching into the main road, a few rods in advance, from a path which struck into it at an oblique angle.

The moon appeared at that moment, and Jack had no difficulty in recognizing Kitty Elliott in the swift rider ahead of him.

"That's funny," he mused. "She doesn't live in this direction. She's going away from home instead of toward it."

Actuated by some strange instinct, the boy removed his cap and placed it over his lamp, thus shutting out every ray of light, both ahead and at the sides.

"I wonder where she can be going?" he thought. "This road hasn't very good name after we get away from town, and more than one mysterious robbery has occurred on it. If anything should happen, I must be on hand to help her. It is foolish for a girl to be out alone at night anyhow, but on a lonely road like this, it's worse."

He had now left the town behind, and before long he came to a little village where there were no lights to be seen in any of the houses, the people being all in their beds apparently.

Jack presently noticed that the other rider had disappeared, but on leaving the village he saw her again, riding like the wind and evidently doing her best to get away from him.

He scorching ahead, soon came within calling distance, and said:

"Kitty, you'd better let me go with you. It isn't really safe for you to be on this road alone."

She made no reply, and Jack rode all the faster, caught up to her and said:

"Really, I do not wish to be rude, but I cannot let you go on alone. The road from this on has a very bad name, especially in the region of Bald Head. If you are going there you must let me go with you."

"I do not feel a bit afraid, thank you, Mr. Foster," said the girl, icily, "and you will please discontinue your efforts at trying to spy out my affairs. It is no business of yours where I am going."

"But Kitty, this is foolish. You know very well that the road is considered dangerous. There have been many robberies, yes, and even murders committed on it. I cannot let you go alone. If you go on I shall certainly follow."

"I beg that you won't do anything of the sort, Jack," Kitty answered, suddenly changing her tone and exhibiting the utmost distress. "I must go on and you must not follow me. I can't explain, but I implore you to turn back and let me go on alone."

"I can't think of it," said Jack, resolutely.

"I'll see whether you can or not," cried Kitty, making a sudden dart toward her head with one hand.

She wore a cap which was kept upon her head by a long pin stuck through her thickly plaited hair, and it was this pin which she now sought to draw out.

Her intention was apparent to Jack in an instant.

She meant to puncture one or both of the tires of his wheel with the sharp pin, and thus put him at a disadvantage.

There was light enough at the moment for him to see the motion, and his quick wit speedily enabled him to divine the reason for it.

"No, you don't!" he cried, swerving to one side and taking the middle of the road.

A faint hissing sound told him that the girl had been partially successful, however, and that a slight puncture had been made in the forward tire.

He quickly sprang off his wheel, opened the tool kit, found a tube of cement, turned the wheel till he felt a slight current of air, squeezed a little of the cement on the puncture, tore a strip from his handkerchief, bound it tightly around the tire, which he pumped up with a small air pump he found in the kit, and then mounted and rode on at full speed.

"I'll have to compliment Tom on keeping things handy," he laughed. "Small as that puncture was, it might have bothered me no end if I hadn't had the stuff to fix it. What did she want to do that for? I can't make her out. One minute she is as nice as can be, and at the next she's a regular spitfire. Girls are queer things, anyhow, and it's hardly worth while trying to find them out."

With this philosophical conclusion, Jack rode on, looking ahead to catch a glimpse of the evasive Kitty, but seeing nothing of her.

He reached the village at the foot of Bald Head without having seen the girl again, and as he passed the miserable collection of houses lying huddled together in the moonlight, he wondered what he would do if their rough tenants were to suddenly spring out upon him.

He kept on till he was half-way to the belt of woods and then dismounted, the road being too steep to continue farther on a wheel.

Then he suddenly paused, for at one side of the road, built against an immense ledge of rock, he saw a little brown hut, the moonlight shining full upon it.

"The brown hut on Bald Head!" he muttered. "This is the place, sure enough. Hallo! what's that?"

Leaning against the hut, near the door, was a drop-frame bicycle, no doubt the very one ridden by Kitty Elliott.

"What brings her to this place?" muttered Jack, laying his wheel down and advancing. "I must know this mystery at all hazards."

He pushed open the door of the hut, which he found ajar, and entered.

Suddenly a light burst upon him and he saw, apparently not more than ten feet distant, Kitty Elliott herself struggling to escape from two men in black clothes with black half-masks on their faces.

"Help!" she screamed, the sound seeming to come from a distance.

"Release that young lady!" cried Jack, springing forward.

At once the light disappeared, and the boy suddenly found himself come in contact with a hard, rough, bare wall, in which there was no cervice or opening of any kind.

CHAPTER IV.

A PERILOUS RIDE.

When Jack struck against the wall it was with such force that for the moment he was stunned, and could scarcely tell what had happened.

Some light came in at the door of the hut and by this he could see that he was in a bare room about ten feet square, there being not a single article of furniture in it.

There was the door by which he had entered and there were two windows, both closed at the time by heavy wooden shutters, but there was neither hearth nor chimney, and no other door than that leading to the road.

"This is a strange place," mused the boy. "I surely saw three persons here, but where are they now? Where could they have gone to so suddenly? They certainly did not pass me and there is no other door by which they might have escaped."

Then he walked quietly around the room, but could find no break in the wall, no sign of a door leading to rooms beyond, and indeed, he could not see how there could be any such when he remembered that the hut was built right against the rock.

"I can't have been dreaming," he said to himself. "This whole strange business cannot be a nightmare. The wheel outside, the screams, the sight of Kitty struggling with the two masked men, these things are surely realities. Can I have lost consciousness instead of being merely stunned by dashing against the wall? It scarcely seems possible."

He went to the door of the hut and looked out, finding everything as still as when he arrived, no one seems to have been disturbed by the screams within, the little village lying dark and quiet in the hollow as before, and no noise being heard except the usual and natural sounds of the night.

His wheel lay on the ground where he had placed it, and Kitty's stood against the hut where he had seen it when he came, so that here, at least, was evidence that he had not been dreaming, and that some part of the strange scenes he had witnessed must have actually occurred.

He picked up his own wheel, put on his cap and stood deliberating what he should do, when, of a sudden Kitty sprang out of the hut, dashed past him and leaped on her wheel as two or three rough-looking men appeared at the door.

"Stop her!" cried a voice, evidently from within.

Jack mounted in haste and sped after Kitty, resolving to protect her even at the risk of his life.

She had turned into a bypath leading from the main road, but the light of Jack's lamp showed which way she had gone and he followed at full speed.

The path was a good one, though rather narrow, and Jack dashed along it at a good rate of speed, the girl being only a few paces ahead of him.

He could hear the heavy tread of his pursuers, and now and then a hoarse cry as one called to another, but he had no fear of not distancing them, providing the road remained good.

It was not the one by which he had come to the hut, but it might be a short cut and be perfectly passable, two things which he must leave to chance or perhaps to Kitty's better knowledge of Bald Head.

Suddenly, however, he heard a cry of alarm in front of him, and came to a halt as quickly as possible, springing from his wheel almost at Kitty's side.

"I have taken the wrong road," the girl said. "I don't see how I came to make such a mistake. What shall I do? They must overtake me now."

"Go on," said Jack. "We can't go back now. We would only fall into their hands."

"Go on?" repeated Kitty. "It is impossible. Do you see what is before us? Oh, why did I come here?"

"Yes, I see," said Jack. "Here, I will take the lead if you are afraid. Follow me and trust in Heaven."

"No—no, I dare not. It is certain death."

"And it is worse than that to stay here. Come, you must follow."

There was little wonder that the girl was terrified.

The path before her was enough to terrify anyone, and even Jack felt that it was most dangerous to follow it.

Kitty had paused upon the edge of a deep gully or ravine, nearly a hundred feet in width, which had once been spanned by a wooden bridge, only a small part of which was now remaining, the rest having been destroyed by fire and flood.

Upon one side the string-pieces reached entirely across the chasm, but on the other side the supports were missing from the middle span, and others had been so bent out of shape or had sunk so deep into the ground as to loosen the stringers which had nearly all fallen into the ravine.

The cross-planks and both rails were entirely gone, and a pile of blackened timbers on the edge of the turbulent stream at the bottom was all that remained of them.

The only means of crossing the chasm was, therefore, the one good string-piece, which was about six inches in width, and supported by heavy timbers resting on either bank of the stream below, and upon hard ground beyond the further bank.

To fall from this narrow bridge meant death, and it was no wonder, therefore, that Kitty was terrified when she saw where her wrong turning had led her.

"Go on," said Jack, sternly. "The way is firm and level, and is the only one you can take. Keep your eyes fixed on me and don't look below as you value your life."

Then he mounted, aimed straight at the narrow bridge, and in a moment was gliding steadily along it, his eyes fixed on the opposite bank.

The moon shone full and clear now, and one great danger was thus removed, as Jack had all the light he wanted, and could see his road plainly before him.

He did not look back, for he felt sure that Kitty had followed, but kept straight on, his eyes on the further bank, and now and then on the narrow path upon which the rays of his lamp shed a bright light.

"Steady!" he called back to Kitty, turning his head for the first time. "Keep your eyes on me, and don't look back or care what happens."

Kitty was three or four lengths behind him, and advancing steadily at an easy pace, her hands gripping the handle bars firmly, her feet moving up and down mechanically on the pedals, and her eyes fixed upon Jack.

That one backward glance that the boy had given had shown him all this, but it had shown him more.

It had shown him one of his pursuers advancing cautiously along the string-piece, one hand swaying lightly to and fro to preserve his balance, the other stretched forward, ready to grasp the fleeing girl.

The man's pace was not rapid, but it was faster than Kitty's, and Jack felt a lump in his throat as he realized the girl's danger.

He wished now that he had sent Kitty ahead, but it was too late now, and he must rely on fortune to effect their escape.

He increased his own speed somewhat, going still at only a moderate pace, hoping that Kitty would involuntarily increase her own rate and thus outwit her pursuer.

"Ha—ha! I've got you!" yelled the man, and Jack turned his head upon the instant.

"Don't look back, the man lies, he is nowhere near you, come straight on," he said with a tone of authority, at the same time increasing his own speed.

The man had evidently hoped to terrify Kitty, and either cause her to fall or to stop, and only Jack's warning words had prevented this.

Seeing the girl escaping him, the fellow leaped forward with outstretched hand, eager to seize her.

Her sudden increase of speed saved her, for the man grasped at nothing, lost his balance, fell across the stringer, hanging by one arm and one leg.

"Steady!" shouted Jack.

The stringer was jarred by the man's fall, but, happily, Kitty has passed to another section, and did not feel the motion.

The man called hoarsely to his companions, two of them answering his summons, and hurrying forward upon the stringer while, at the same time, he secured a hold with his free arm, and drew himself first to his knees and then upon his feet.

"Come on!" he shouted. "The thing will hold us, and it's wide enough if you don't look down. Come on; the gal knows too much and the boy is the very one we want."

Jack was now midway over the chasm, and Kitty was just a length behind.

The natural delay caused by the foremost pursuer's fall, had given the fugitives an advantage, and they were now fully ten yards in the lead.

"Come on! Scorch!" cried Jack. "It's as firm as a rock here. Come on!"

He dashed ahead at full speed, the path being plain and clear before him, lighted both by the moon and the strong, white rays of his bicycle lamp.

Kitty seemed to take on his enthusiasm, as if by instinct, for she suddenly sprinted and followed so close behind that when the boy struck the path beyond the bridge he was obliged to turn sharply to one side to avoid a collision.

Springing from his wheel, Jack looked along the path over which he had just passed and saw that the leader of the pursuing party was little more than half-way across the chasm, the others being from fifteen to twenty-five feet behind.

"They won't get over in time to overtake us," he muttered. "I suppose this road leads down the mountain? Do you know?" turning to address Kitty.

To his great surprise the girl was nowhere to be seen, and, remounting, he followed the rather steep path till it came into the main road just below the little village.

Then by the moon's aid he saw a swiftly moving figure on the road a considerable distance in advance and doubted not that it was Kitty Elliott.

"Girls are queer creatures," he muttered, and then flew down the hill and towards home.

He lost sight of the girl long before he reached the outskirts of the town, and did not see her again.

"It's all very strange," he mused. "She didn't stop to say

a word even, either of thanks or blame. Well, I don't know that I want to be thanked for doing my plain duty, but she might, at least, have said good-night if she didn't want me to go back with her."

After this he gave no further thought to the matter but rode rapidly home, dismounting in front of the gate as the town clocks were striking two.

"I know just as much as I did when I started, and I'm dead tired in the bargain," he said to himself, as he sat on the edge of his bed, leisurely taking off his clothes. "What have I accomplished by my trip to Bald Head? Just nothing, and the mystery is deeper than ever. Catch me taking an idiot dwarf's advice again. I'll mind my own business, and let folks say what they like."

With this conclusion, which was certainly a philosophical one, under the circumstances, Jack very leisurely got into bed and in a few minutes was fast asleep, while those under the same roof with him knew nothing of his absence, nor of the stirring events which were one day to influence all their lives and, indeed, of this last affair Jack knew as little as they.

CHAPTER V.

JACK TO THE RESCUE.

"Well, Tom, how do you get on at the bank?"

"Oh, pretty well, I guess."

"Who's there beside you?"

"Well, there's Ned Elliott and Bob Marriner and the cashier and the tellers and some others."

"What does Ned Elliott do?"

"He's a sort of clerk."

"Isn't the judge rich enough not to have his son work in the bank?"

"I suppose so. I wish I had all the spending money Ned has. Then I could go around and have a good time just as he does."

"You stick to business, young fellow, and never mind going around just yet," said Jack, who had been having a quiet conversation with Tom while they were alone in the sitting room waiting for supper.

Tom had been just a week in the bank and did very satisfactory work, as Jack had learned from the cashier, whom he had consulted privately and without his brother's knowledge.

"Don't you want me to ever have a good time?" asked Tom, rather impatiently.

"Yes, but running around town the way Ned Elliott does is not the way to have it. He has too much spending money for his own good, in my opinion."

"I don't see how you should know about it. You never go anywhere, only sit in the house and loaf your time away."

This last remark was Phil's, the elder son, having entered unobserved just before the conclusion of Jack's comment upon Ned Elliott.

"He don't do anything of the sort," spoke up Tom, who had lately taken to defending Jack upon all occasions. "He works a heap sight more'n you do, Phil Foster. You wouldn't carry a hod of bricks on your shoulder in the hot, broiling sun the way Jack did."

"Just as if he ever did," sneered Phil, picking up a newspaper lying on the sitting-room table.

"Well, he did, and I saw him, and you can ask Mulready, the contractor, if he didn't."

"I asked you not to say anything about that, Tom," said Jack quietly, taking his glasses from his pocket and diving into a book.

"Well, I know that I said I would not, and I would never have said a word if Phil hadn't talked so dasty about you."

"Carrying bricks, eh?" said Phil, in a most exasperating way. "So you have been at work, have you? Couldn't you

find something more suited to your position in society than carrying bricks? That's just like your low spirit. Carrying bricks, indeed! Gentlemen's sons don't engage in such menial employment. I'm disgusted with you, sir!"

When Philip Foster wanted to be particularly cutting in his remarks to his younger brothers, he affixed the term "sir" to the one he was addressing, as in this instance, the effect upon Tom being to further irritate him, while Jack did not seem to notice the sarcasm.

"He don't go around to saloons playing billiards, and smoking and drinking his money away, as you do," said Tom, hotly. "You'd better say nothing about keeping up your position in society. You do it, a fat lot, don't you?"

"Tom!" said Jack, sharply, "I told you not to tell tales out of school. You're getting altogether too fond of using slang, and mother doesn't like it."

"Well, he makes me so mad, I can't help it," said Tom, going to the window and looking out.

The supper bell prevented any further discussion, and Phil, who had seemed ready to say something especially sarcastic to Tom, threw down his paper and left the room.

"You mustn't rile up Phil like that, young fellow," said Jack. "Remember, he is older than you are."

"Well, I hate to hear him run you down like that when I know you don't deserve it," said Tom, by way of excuse.

"That's all right, Tom. Thanks for sticking up for me, but at the same time you mustn't cheek Phil like that, nor tell unpleasant things about him. How do you know he goes about like that?"

"Ned Elliott said he did."

"Well, never mind what he says and keep away from him except in business hours. Are you ready for supper? Come on then, and tell Phil you're sorry for what you said."

"I will for you, but not for him," said Tom doggedly.

The trouble was not all over, however, for, although Tom apologized to Phil, as he had promised, the elder brother seemed ready to pounce upon anyone, and an opportunity was soon afforded him.

"Oh, by the way, mother," said Jack, when the meal was half over, "the Continental Theater Company plays all next week at the Opera House and will rehearse here this week. They don't want to go to a hotel, but prefer to live in a private house. I said I thought you could accommodate them. They will pay eight dollars a week all around. There are ten people and for two weeks that will make——"

"Your mother doesn't take boarders, sir," said Philip.

"I told Barnes I thought you might," Jack went on, "and the manager will call to-night."

Everyone except Tom and Mrs. Foster protested against Jack's plan, and there was a regular hubbub for a few minutes.

Jack said nothing till it was all over, and then said quietly:

"They are all respectable, well-behaved people, and you would never take them for actors. I'm sure I don't see any harm in taking them on the recommendation of Mr. Barnes."

"Who is Mr. Barnes, pray?" asked Phil, superciliously.

"The editor of the Banner. You know the paper, I believe? You were reading it just before supper time," Jack answered, with his usual impassiveness.

The Banner was the leading newspaper of the town, and Phil had always read and approved it, and he had, therefore no more to say, although he wondered how Jack happened to know the editor.

The manager of the theatrical company called on Mrs. Foster that evening, and so won her heart by his gentle, manly manner that she agreed to take him and his company to board for the next two weeks.

Towards the end of the week, when the company had been two or three days at the Foster house, Jack went to the Opera

House in the morning to see a rehearsal of a comedy at the manager's invitation.

At the close of the rehearsal he left the theater to go home, and at the first crossing was suddenly accosted by the hideous dwarf who had sent him on his fruitless errand to Bald Head ten days before.

"Ho, ho, ho! you didn't find out anything, did you?" said the dreadful creature, with a most disagreeable chuckle. "Too lazy to try, wasn't you? Hah! we're a pair of us, Lazy Jack and Lazy Jim."

"There was nothing to find out," said Jack. "The whole thing was a hoax."

"Ho, ho! that's what you think, is it?" chuckled the dwarf. "The next time you go to Bald Head you must get into the parlor. You only got as far as the hall. Go there again. I'll tell you when."

Then the uncanny object suddenly sped away, leaving Jack as much mystified as ever.

A few minutes later he met Kitty Elliott on the main street of the town, and tipped his hat as she approached.

She wore a tailor-made walking dress of brown cloth with a knot of red ribbon at her throat, a cloth hat to match and tan shoes, and carried a light umbrella, tightly folded, in her hand.

"You ran away from me the other night," said Jack. "I should have seen you safely home."

"I have neglected to thank you for what you did that night," said Kitty. "Let me do so now."

"What took you to such a place at that time of night?" asked Jack, in a firm, resolute tone, with not an atom of prying curiosity in it. "It was dangerous, to say nothing of being rather singular."

"It was dangerous," said Kitty, with a shudder. "Again let me thank you."

"But tell me," pursued Jack, the sunlight flashing on his glasses as he raised his head, "where were you when I heard you call for help? Where did you come from when you suddenly ran out? Was there a trap-door or anything like that in the hut?"

"How are your sisters?" asked Kitty. "I have not seen Susie in a long time. Why doesn't she call? Won't you bring her up to the house some evening—to-morrow, for instance?"

"I must know why you went to the hut on Bald Head," said Jack, quietly, but with great resolution. "That entire region bears a terrible reputation, and——"

"I am not aware, Mr. Foster," said Kitty, icily, "that I am accountable to you for my actions. Good-morning."

She passed him with a cold, disdainful nod and a flash of anger in her eyes, leaving him thoroughly stupefied for a few moments.

He was suddenly and in a most startling manner recalled to his senses.

Shouts, screams and an alarming cry burst upon his ears.

"Mad dog! Look out!"

On the instant Jack turned and dashed forward.

An immense dog, foaming at the mouth, came tearing along the pavement.

A few feet of broken rope, fastened about his neck, trailed behind him as he came rushing on.

Men and women fled in terror, as well they might, his foaming jaws, bloodshot eyes and cruel claws being enough to intimidate the stoutest heart.

The slender boy leaped forward, his face as pale as death and every nerve quivering with excitement.

The dog had panned not two paces from Kitty, who stood transfixed before him, and drew himself together for a spring at her throat.

The knot of red ribbon had attracted him and it was at that that he was about to spring.

Without an instant's hesitation, Jack snatched the folded umbrella from Kitty's hand, pushed her aside almost rudely and struck fiercely at the maddened brute just as he was about to spring.

The blow struck him squarely across the head, the steel ribs of the umbrella cutting into the flesh and drawing blood.

With an angry growl he flew at the boy, who rained swinging blows, one after another upon his head, each one cutting deep and drawing blood.

The umbrella was speedily ruined, the silk hanging in shreds from the ribs, the ribs themselves being twisted and bent out of shape.

Being held together by a steel rod, instead of the usual wooden stick, the loss of the ribs did not count for much, and Jack still possessed a most effective weapon.

As the dog, maddened beyond endurance, but weak and trembling from loss of blood and from repeated repulses, made a final savage dash at the boy, the latter struck him a sudden, fierce downward blow across the skull, and stretched him at his feet.

Someone rushed up, seized the rope about the dog's neck and dragged him away, two or three quick reports of a pistol being presently heard.

"I have ruined your umbrella, Miss Elliott," said Jack, in a careless tone, although anyone could see that he was trembling violently. "Let me send you another. I will try and match the color."

"He's clear grit, right through," whispered a man standing near, "and they call him the lazy one of the family."

Tom Foster, on an errand for the bank, came along at this moment, saw Jack as if about to fall, caught him, and asked excitedly:

"What's the matter, Jack, have you been hurt?"

"No, no, old man, it is nothing, just a little faintness, that's all. See Miss Elliott to her home, will you? She is somewhat nervous and excited. I'm all right."

He seemed to recover himself and started to leave, when Kitty caught him by the hand.

"You are a noble fellow, Jack," she said. "Forgive me for what I said just now."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," said Jack, carelessly, and then he went away while Kitty followed him with a look which might have brought him back, had he seen it.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SCENT.

On Saturday morning Jack went to the Opera House to attend a rehearsal of the company that was to play there the next week.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the manager, when the company had assembled on the stage in their ordinary costumes, "I wish you to listen to the reading of a new play. It has been said that you excel in comedy. I have heard the piece read, but I wish to hear your judgment of it. Please give me your undivided attention. Mr. Foster, we are ready."

Jack stepped forward, a thick, square book in his hand, and at once claimed the attention of all.

Could it be that this pale, stooping boy who wore glasses could be the author of a play which their manager had approved? It seemed impossible.

Jack began to read and quickly caught the attention of all.

The plot was simple and easy to follow, but the dialogue was so bright, the situations so novel and the climaxes at the ends of the various acts so cleverly devised that everyone present was delighted.

As fast as Jack finished reading an act he was urged to

go on, and when he had finished the play exclamations of approval were heard on all sides.

"It's better than anything we ever did,"

"I should just love to play 'Dollie Dobbs.' I never had a better part."

"There's a half-dozen parts there that would fit me like a glove."

"The first act is great, the second is immense, and the third—well, it's out of sight!"

"Well," asked the manager smiling, while Jack stood calm but pale beside him, "shall I cast the piece and put it in rehearsal?"

"Yes!" cried all the company as one person.

"Very well. Here are the parts. Rehearsal on Monday at nine. Now for Monday's piece."

When Jack went home to dinner that day, he took his mother aside, gave her five hundred dollars in crisp, new bills of one hundred dollars apiece, and said:

"That is to send Phil to college, but you are not to say that I gave it to you. The money is yours now."

"But Jack, where did you——"

"I have sold a comedy to the Continentals. They play it next week. You shall see it, but you mustn't tell a soul that I wrote it."

"But Jack, dear, it is not right that you should not get the credit of——"

"I'll get it all right some day," said Jack, "so please keep my secret. There's a good mother," and he kissed her, which perhaps accounted for a suspicious moistness on his glasses and perhaps did not.

The comedy was produced toward the end of the next week, and scored such an instant success that it had to be repeated till the end of the week and during all the next week, the company prolonging its engagement.

Its authorship was kept secret, although an announcement was made that a resident of the town was responsible for its having been written, but that for various reasons the name could not for the present be disclosed.

Phil entered upon his first term at college, Tom kept on at the bank, the younger children remained at school, and Mrs. Foster had a house full of boarders, having had no trouble in securing plenty of desirable tenants after the theatrical company had gone on its travels.

Susie was studying art, and Jack was about the house or off on the mountains or in the woods, as was usual with him, and the townspeople continued to call him the lazy one of the family, and to wonder why he did not do something instead of making his mother work so hard keeping boarders.

One day in late October when the trees were glorious in their autumn garb of red and gold and purple and brown, and a haze rested upon the distant mountains, Jack left the house, telling his mother that he might not be back till night, and started off toward the woods as he had done many times before.

He had wandered how far he was uncertain, and had little idea of the time, when at last he sat down on a fallen log to rest and think, although he had been doing the latter ever since leaving home.

The woods were quite thick at that point, although there seemed to be a sort of path through them, leading close by the log on which he sat.

He was almost asleep from sheer weariness when he was aroused by the sound of voices and sat up straight.

"We'll settle that in the parlor," he heard a man say, there being something familiar in the voice.

Actuated by some strange motive, he knew not what, he dropped behind the log and lay close alongside, so that owing

to the darkness of the place, no one would have discovered him unless they had stumbled upon him.

In a few moments he heard footsteps among the dry leaves and then a voice said:

"We can talk it over here just as well as in the parlor. There's no reason why you and me shouldn't speculate a bit on our own account."

"Maybe not," said the first voice, and Jack again wondered where he had heard it. "We ought to let him into it, 'cause he's put us up to a good many good things in the brown hut on Bald Head."

At once it came to Jack where he had heard that voice.

It belonged to the man who had been most active in pursuit the night that he and Kitty had escaped across the ruined bridge.

"Yes, I know," said the other, "but he's getting afraid to take big jobs. Suppose the paymaster shows fight? It may mean somebody being done for, and it's more'n likely to be the paymaster, and the boss don't like them jobs nowadays."

The men sat on the fallen log, their backs toward where Jack lay, and the boy fully realized the peril of discovery.

"You're right, Jim, and I guess we better leave him out. He'll be at the parlor to-night, but we can talk about other things. I ain't sure that he didn't have something to do with Jack's coming to the hut that night."

"Maybe he did and maybe my Jim knew something, too. I think sometimes Jim ain't as crazy as he looks. In spite of his bringing up and for all the thumps he's had, by reason of which he's got such an elegant figger, I'm half persuaded to think sometimes that Jim wants to be honest."

"Ho, ho! That's a good one—Lazy Jim, the ugly, red-headed dwarf turning honest! His grandfather was strung up, likewise his uncle, and maybe his dad'll go the same road, and now he's turning honest! Don't you believe it, Jim!"

"All the same I ain't going to let him in the parlor again for a long time, till I'm sure of him," growled the other. "Come, it's cold here. The paymaster business is as good as settled then?"

"Yes, I guess it is."

The men arose and followed the path by which they had come, leaving Jack greatly puzzled by what he had heard.

"The dwarf spoke about the parlor," he mused, "and now these men use the same term. So they suspect Jim of betraying them? What about this paymaster affair? Someone to be robbed, no doubt. What paymaster? I wonder how I can find out? The brown hut on Bald Head is no doubt the resort of thieves and murderers, but what is this parlor they speak about? Another of their meeting places, I suppose. I wish I had believed Jim and asked him where it was to be found. Now I don't suppose I shall ever find it."

He followed the path the men had taken, but finally found himself in the thicket, with no sign of a path anywhere, having somehow lost it.

He finally made his way to better ground and then went on, coming out at length into a cleared space on the edge of a precipitous ledge of rock from which he could see Bald Head rising above him at no great distance.

"I have some idea where I am," he thought, "but I'm further away from home than I imagined. The sun is pretty well down, too, and it's growing cold. If I'd thought I was coming this way, I would have brought Tom's wheel with me."

Making his way along the edge of the ledge he was presently able to descend by easy steps to another, and from this passed through a bit of wood, still descending and still following the direction which he judged would take him to the road down the mountain and past the little village.

Now he lost sight of the top of the mountain and then he saw it again, pushing on as rapidly as possible, for the sun was getting lower and the air was much colder.

Finally he lost sight of the summit and found himself in a dense tangle of underbrush and new growth of trees, where there were huge boulders scattered about and not the slightest sign of a road or even a path, however slight.

He climbed upon a great rock, hoping to take his bearings from the top, but when he had almost reached the highest point a loose fragment of stone turned under his feet and he was thrown suddenly forward.

He caught a glimpse of an opening in the rock, and then shot suddenly forward and down a sort of natural chute, deep and dark, and well-nigh precipitous.

It was impossible to check his flight, and sliding, rolling and falling, he went down at a rapid rate till he presently came to sudden pause with such violence as to render him temporarily insensible.

He recovered himself after an interval which seemed to be long, but might not have been, to find himself lying on a bed of something soft, possibly moss, in some dark place, but whether this were a house or a hole in the ground he was unable to determine.

By degrees his faculties returned and he sat up, feeling himself all over to ascertain if there were any broken bones, and being greatly satisfied to learn that beyond a few bruises and several rents in his clothing, he had escaped injury.

At length the place seemed to grow less dark, or perhaps his eyes were more accustomed to it, but at any rate there did seem to be a light somewhere, and he arose and groped his way in the direction whence it proceeded.

He felt in his pocket for his glasses so that he might see the better, but he could not find them and presumed that he must have lost them during his rapid descent into what he now knew must be a cave in the mountains.

The light grew stronger as he went on, and he presently entered a passage evidently leading to some other chamber whence the light came.

He heard voices and proceeded more carefully, keeping as much in the shade as possible, and making no more noise than was absolutely necessary.

Before long he could see into a rocky chamber twenty feet square, in the middle of which was a rude table, upon which was a flaming torch stuck in a knothole and gathered about which were five or six roughly clad men.

"Well, what's the next job?" asked one, in a hoarse voice.

"That depends on whether the boss comes to the parlor to-night," said the man called Jim.

At once Jack realized that he had found, without knowing it, the secret hiding-place of the robbers on Bald Head.

CHAPTER VII.

A DESPERATE ESCAPE.

Jack was greatly excited when he realized how his sudden fall had resulted, and that he had come without premeditation to a meeting of the lawless band that infested the mountain.

He had found his way into the cave quite by accident, and the next thing to think of was how to get out without being discovered.

There might be a way of escape at the back of the cave, but he did not know how to find it, and his only feasible plan was, therefore, to wait and hear all he could and then follow the outlaws when they left the place.

He was in no danger of discovery where he was, and he could both hear and see, which was of great importance.

"The question before the house is whether we'd better call on the paymaster of the Stonehill Quarry Works this week."

Jack heard Jim say. "He'll have a lot of money with him and we kin use it in our business as well as him, but he never goes without a brace of revolvers, and he has a couple of big dogs at his house."

"Dogs kin be p'isoned, and the paymaster kin be got out o' the house on a wild goose chase," said Jack's old enemy. "I say we leave it to the boss to say what we do about it."

"Will the boss be at the hut to-night?" asked several men at once.

"Reckon he will," said Jim.

"Is the curtain up?"

"Yes."

"Then if he does come he'll see us here."

"Sure."

Jack leaned forward as far as he dared to get a look at the curtain the man spoke of, but could see nothing of the sort.

There was a narrow passage at the opposite side of the chamber, and he could see along this for a short distance, but there was no sign of any curtain, and as there were no windows to the place he did not see what need there was of one.

"He'll be here soon enough," said Jim. "It's a long way for him to come, and he's got to be sly about it."

"Wonder if the gal will come again and try to get him to give up the business?"

"Reckon she'd better not," growled Jim. "She'll come once too often if she does."

"There won't be no Lazy Jack to help her the next time neither."

Jack started and was nearly betrayed into uttering an exclamation of surprise.

What could Kitty Elliott have in common with these lawless men?

Could it be possible that a man so thoroughly respected as Judge Elliott could be one of them, and that Kitty had gone to Bald Head to induce him to part company with them?

It seemed utterly unreasonable, and Jack could scarcely believe that he had heard aright.

He must hear more and he crouched almost to the ground and pressed forward, every sense on the alert, when suddenly a man burst into the room and said:

"Look at this thing what I found. It's that rascal boy again, come to find out something."

"What's that? A spectacle case?"

"That's what it is, and it's got his letters on it, J. F., and if that ain't Jack Foster, I don't know what it is."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the cave out there."

"How'd it get there?"

"Don't know, 'less he come down the chimney, but here it is all the same."

Jack could account for the finding of the case in only one way.

It must have slipped from his pocket in his sudden descent, and thus have been found on the floor of the cave.

How the finder got into the council chamber without passing him was a mystery, unless there were other passages.

"And the glasses is still here," said the man. "That shows he didn't chuck the thing away, and it fell down the chimney. No, sir; he came down himself. I found 'em just under it."

"Then he's there yet!" cried Jim. "Run and catch him."

Jack had arisen at the first alarm, and had retreated, and now, as he heard Jim give orders to search for him, he drew back still further.

Hurried footsteps were heard in the passage, and the light was suddenly cut off, but in another instant there came another interruption as startling as the first.

"Well, if there ain't the gal!"

"Hallo! What do you want?"

"Don't let her get away!"

The light suddenly entered the passage again, and Jack knew that the men had left it.

"What would you do?" asked a voice, which Jack instantly recognized as Kitty's.

"Put you where you won't do us no more harm," snarled the man who had led the former pursuit.

"Help!" screamed Kitty.

Without a thought as to his danger, Jack dashed along the passage and leaped into the cave.

Two rough men had seized Kitty, while others were hurrying forward to their assistance.

"Stop!" cried Jack in a voice of command, as he sprang into the room.

Seizing the torch from the hole in the table, he struck at the two men with it, dealing one a blow full across the head.

A second blow alighted on Jim's hand, and a shower of sparks fell to the floor.

Undismayed by the greater number of his foes, Jack struck about him with the blazing torch, and the men uttering cries of rage, fell back.

"Come this way!" the brave boy gasped, seizing Kitty by the arm. "There is not an instant to lose."

He dashed toward the passage opposite that in which he had at first stood while the men, recovering from their first surprise, followed him with hoarse shouts.

There was not room for two persons to walk abreast in the passage, and Jack pushed Kitty in front of him bidding her to hasten.

"You will be taken!" she said.

"Never mind if I am, go on."

"But I am afraid this is not the right passage."

"Go on," cried Jack. "We can't turn back now."

In a few moments they came out into the open air, the full moon shining above the tree tops.

Close at hand lay a pile of logs, in one of which an ax was stuck.

"Go on," muttered Jack, urging his companion forward, throwing down his torch and wrenching the ax from its place.

The wind sighed among the trees and there was a sound of rushing water not far away.

The moon lighted the path as if it had been day, and their way was plain before them.

Kitty hesitated, however, and murmured in great agitation:

"I am afraid there is no escape. This place is a perfect maze. We have taken the wrong path."

"Then do you escape while I cover your retreat. We must go on."

As they hurried on the sound of rushing waters increased, and presently Jack saw the cause of this.

Up on the mountain there were numerous springs, and these, overflowing, made streams, which, fed by the rains, grew most turbulent.

The path suddenly ended at one of these mountain streams.

From a ledge of rock thirty feet above them, the water came rushing down in a fall of forty feet in height.

At the place where Kitty suddenly paused, there was a level bank, about ten feet in front of the fall, and extending a few feet only beyond this.

Opposite it, at a distance of twenty feet, was another bank, and from that point there was a path leading down the mountain.

"We are lost!" cried Kitty. "How can we cross the stream?"

"By the bridge," said Jack, pointing to a tree which had been felled so as to span the chasm.

At this moment the hoarse voices of the pursuers were heard, rising above the noise of the falling waters.

"Make haste!" cried Jack. "The bridge is firm and strong, and I will see that you cross safely."

The moon rode high in the heavens, and bridge, falls, wood and ledge were thrown in full relief.

Kitty sprang upon the narrow bridge, to which there was no hand-rail, and cheered on by the courageous boy, advanced rapidly to the center.

Jack followed, ax in hand, and as he reached a point a third of the way across, turned and stood facing his pursuers.

He was without hat or coat, and the light, shining full upon his slight figure, revealed to the pursuing outlaws a form like that of a hero of old, an enemy not to be despised, and one who would defend the honor of the weak with his last drop of blood.

The outlaws paused, irresolute, on the brink of the chasm, no one daring to take the first step.

"I'll kill any or all who set foot on the bridge till that young lady is safe across," hissed Jack, and the robbers never doubted that he would keep his word.

"Shoot down the young cub!" cried one. "We've had trouble enough from him already."

"No, he must be taken alive and made one of us," snarled Jim. "That will be a sweet revenge."

"Make haste!" whispered Jack, turning his head for an instant, and seeing that Kitty had again paused.

"Shoot the girl and capture the boy!" cried Jim.

"Shoot them both and have an end to our trouble with them!"

"No, no, the boy must be spared."

"Advance at your peril!" shouted Jack, brandishing the ax, on the sharp blade of which the moonlight glinted. "He dies who sets a foot on the bridge!"

A sudden quivering of the fallen tree told Jack that Kitty had reached the other bank and he darted forward two or three paces, then turning and facing his pursuers, two of whom had stepped upon the bridge.

He covered the remaining distance, swung his ax vigorously and began cutting at the tree where it rested upon the bank.

The chips flew and the bridge began to show signs of weakening.

"Back with you!" roared Jim. "The young imp will get the best of us after all."

"Shoot the pestilent young cub!"

There were three or four quick reports; a bullet flattened itself on the blade of the ax, one cut a twig not six inches above Jack's head and the others whistled very close to him, but he only redoubled his efforts and the rude bridge presently fell into the stream below, the men upon it barely reaching the opposite bank with their lives.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT A LAZY BOY COULD DO.

When satisfied that the pursuit of the outlaws was cut off for a time, at least, for it was possible that they could throw another bridge across the chasm, Jack threw away his ax and hurried down the rugged path.

"Kitty, Kitty! it's all right—they can't follow; I've cut the bridge!" he called, as he ran on. "Wait a moment! You mustn't go down the mountain alone!"

He presently saw the girl standing in a small, open space waiting for him, and as he joined her they both hurried on.

"You are a brave boy, Jack," Kitty said at length. "Twice you have saved me from these miserable creatures."

"But why do you go there?" asked Jack. "You surely have nothing in common with them?"

"Why do you go there yourself?" replied Kitty, sharply.

"This time it was by accident; the first time I wished to learn something."

"So did I," returned Kitty, quickly, and then, the path becoming plainer, she ran ahead as if desirous of ridding herself of her escort.

"Wait!" cried Jack. "Yonder lies the village. It is dangerous to pass it."

They were almost upon the little village in a few moments, the path suddenly turning abruptly into the main road down the mountain.

All was dark and still in the village, however, and not a sound came from the huts closely huddled together as the boy and girl flew by.

At the foot of the mountain Kitty suddenly sprang forward, and Jack, who was only a few paces behind, saw her leap into a light wagon, drawn by a single horse, and drive rapidly away.

"Good-night, Jack!" she called back at him, and then he heard a ringing laugh mingling with the sounds of the wheels and the hoofbeats of the horse.

The boy stood in the road for a few moments utterly dumbfounded.

What his feelings were might well be imagined, perhaps, but when he at length spoke, all he said was:

"Well, girls are funny things, and the fellow who can make 'em out is a regular wizard."

There was no word of complaint against the girl he had so bravely defended, and who in return had left him to walk nearly ten miles in the chill October night, insufficiently clad and on a road noted for its evil reputation.

With the simple comment that girls were queer creatures, Jack set out upon his weary journey, now whistling, now singing, not to keep up his courage, but simply for company, and mile after mile was thus left behind him till he was really surprised at finding himself on the outskirts of the town.

There was a cheerful fire burning in the sitting-room when Jack entered his mother's house, and, greatly to his surprise, Tom was standing in front of it, having evidently only just entered, as he still retained his hat and light overcoat, and was engaged in drawing off his gloves.

"Hello, Jack, come down to see how late I came home?" asked Tom, turning.

"No, I have only just come in myself," answered Jack, simply, going up to the fire.

Tom saw him shiver, noticed that his hands and face were blue with the cold, and said:

"You haven't been out with no hat nor coat, Jack?"

"Yes, and walked ten miles at that."

"Where have you been?"

"On Bald Head."

"I don't think you show much consideration for mother, to say nothing of your own health," said Tom, impatiently. "No doubt she has been worrying about you all the evening. I shouldn't think you'd be so thoughtless. If I had done it you'd 've made no end of a row."

"Perhaps," said Jack, quietly. "I suppose I have a nasty temper. However, mother knows that I have been out, and will not worry."

"But what have you been doing on Bald Head, and why did you walk? Did you bust my wheel? You punctured it once before, you know."

Tom did not mention the fact that Jack had bought him a new tire, which was quite true.

"No, I did not use your wheel, Tom; I walked both ways."

"But what under the sun took you to Bald Head?"

"Oh, I had business there," was the careless answer, and then the boy went to the pantry for something to eat, having had nothing for hours.

When he returned to the sitting-room, Tom had gone up to bed.

"It's late for Tom," he mused. "However, it may be all right. I won't say anything, but I shall have to keep my eyes open a little more, perhaps."

He did not leave the house for the next two or three days, spending his time in writing and reading, and getting the name of being idle, though that troubled him but little, so long as his mother did not complain.

On the second day a stout, smooth shaven, severe-looking gentleman called to see him and was shown up to his room where he sat at work.

"My name is Marriner," he began.

"Yes, paymaster of the Stonehill Quarry," added Jack. "I am well acquainted with your son and daughter, but know you only by sight. Won't you sit down?"

"You sent me a letter of warning, but did not give me full particulars," said the other, in rather a doubting tone. "I don't pay any attention to such matters as a rule, but your letter was so mysterious that I thought it best to see you and get you to explain."

"There was nothing mysterious about it, sir," said Jack, in his usual tone. "I wrote you that there was a plan on foot to rob you just before the next pay day at the quarry, and that you had best be prepared. I did not wish to write you all the particulars, as letters sometimes go astray."

"I can hardly believe that any one would attempt so rash a thing when it is well known that I always go armed and keep two ferocious dogs," said the paymaster, with an air of great confidence in himself.

"Nevertheless," said Jack, quietly, "the attempt will be made, and you would best take extra precautions. Keep your money in the bank until you need it to pay off the men. Don't keep it in your house as you have done heretofore."

"Nonsense!" laughed the paymaster.

"Oh, very well," said Jack, apparently not at all nettled. "Will you excuse me now? I have some work I especially desire to get finished to-day. You won't mind my not going down with you? I am not feeling very strong to-day."

The strong, hearty man looked at the delicate, stoop-shouldered boy wearing glasses at his age, and said, impatiently:

"Come, come, there may be something in what you say after all. You certainly do not look like one who would play a joke on me or who would be frightened at nothing. Tell me all you know about this matter," and Mr. Marriner sat down, having been standing during the preceding interview.

Jack related what he had heard and seen on the mountain, telling only what referred to the paymaster's case, however, and no more.

The narrative seemed to impress the man greatly, and he said as he arose to go:

"Well, I will take your advice. My wife has often asked me not to keep the men's money in the house, and I won't. Good-day."

"One moment," said Jack. "I would appear to do things the same as you have always done. Go to the bank, but take home a package of blank paper, not money, and do not appear to be any more concerned than usual. You will be watched, and you must not do anything to alarm the thieves. Moreover, do not go away on any summons from out of town, although you might appear to do so. If you follow this plan you will nab the robbers nicely."

"I will do as you suggest," said Mr. Marriner.

Two days afterward the paymaster called again and went up to Jack's room.

"Well, I've got a great story to tell you," said Jack's visitor, sitting down, a broad smile upon his face. "Yesterday I went

to the bank and left it with a nice pile of white paper in my little valise. I saw two men watching me when I came out, but I never let on that I saw them, but went straight to the house and put the package in my desk, where I always have kept it.

"In the afternoon I heard from my brother in Boston. He wanted me to come and see him without delay, as he was exceedingly ill and not likely to live through the night. Well, I took the train for Boston—that is, I left town on it, but I did not go anywhere near Boston. I went to the next town and wired my brother to know what was the matter with him. He sent back word that there wasn't anything the matter with him, but that there seemed to be with me.

"Well, then I came back to town, but nobody would have known me for myself, for I had a new suit of clothes, wore a silk hat and a beard, and sat talking with my own wife for five minutes, and she never knew me till I told her who I was and took off my beard. Julie and the boy were out, so they never knew a word about it, and they thought I was in Boston.

"Early in the evening I heard the dogs making a fuss in the yard, and, looking through the blinds, I saw a rough-looking fellow throw something at them and go away. Now, I have trained those dogs not to touch a piece of meat or anything else, unless I give it to them, and tell them they can have it, and a stranger would have to club them to death, and then he couldn't get them to take anything.

"I went out on the quiet to get the meat or whatever it was, but our fool cat, seeing that the dogs wouldn't touch it, had hooked on to it and was eating away for all her life. That's just what it was, too, for she went into convulsions and died before I could get the stuff away, and the doctor said there was arsenic enough in it to kill a horse.

"Well, I kept quiet, and everybody went to bed, only my wife knowing that I was in the house, and she not knowing why, because women are scarey things, and I did not want to frighten her. After all hands had gone to bed, I went down into the library and waited all alone in the dark for my friends to come, because I knew they would.

"It was pretty late when I heard a slight noise at the window, which opens to the floor, and pretty soon it swung open and in came three men, with their stockings over their shoes, and slouched hats on their heads.

"They went straight to the desk, pried it open and took out the package of nice white paper, chuckling at the capture they had made, and at how well they had cheated the paymaster, and then they started for the window. It was my turn then, and I jumped up and showed them two six-shooters and told them to march straight into a closet or I'd let the moon shine straight through them.

"Well, they wanted to argue the case, but I am a pretty good shot, and one of them knows it by the hole in his ear this morning, and they went in and stayed there under lock and key till I sent someone for the police.

"They're in the lock-up now, and the men at the Stonehill Works have been paid, same as usual. By the way, I showed them the stuff they had come for, and had the joke on them. Now, Mr. Jim Stover, Mr. Pete Hill and Mr. Bill Brown are in a fair way to go to the penitentiary for a long term, and it's all owing to you."

"No, not to me, but to your own courage and ingenuity," said Jack.

CHAPTER IX.

DAMAGING EVIDENCE.

Jack met Jim, the dwarf, one day in the following week, as he was coming out of the Banner office.

The ugly creature scowled at him and said with an angry growl:

"You got my old man sent up. Ugh! I've a mind to bite you!" and the dwarf showed his fangs in a way to terrify almost any one.

"You sent me to the place," said Jack. "It was my duty to prevent a robbery. How did I know that your father would be taken?"

"Well, don't you go again. I've got the blame for giving the old man away, and I don't want you to do any more mischief."

"If it is mischief to break up a lawless gang like the one on Bald Head I am likely to do more of it," said Jack, who was not to be frightened, although he spoke in no boastful tone.

"You look out that you don't find that your own dad wasn't mixed up in it!" snarled the dwarf. "It don't do to ask too many questions sometimes, my high-toned young cub. Maybe your father was a thief as well as mine!"

For an instant Jack was thunderstruck and stood like one suddenly seized with paralysis.

"He, he, he! that shot struck home," cried the dwarf, with an idiotic laugh, and then he suddenly darted away and in an instant was out of sight.

"I'll not believe it," whispered Jack, as he walked on, scarcely knowing whither he was going. "The vile creature said it simply to be revenged on me, for his father's being sent to prison. No, no, it can't be possible. Why the very whisper of it would kill poor mother. Oh, the shame of it! The very suggestion unmans me. No, I will not believe it!"

He went the rounds of the newspapers of the town, being now a regular contributor to all, and furnishing them with editorials, verse, short stories, critical articles and reports of local happenings, being on the staff of none but earning money from all.

At the various offices he was well received, and by the time he had finished his business with them, the disagreeable impression left by the dwarf's evil speech had quite vanished, even if the cause were not forgotten.

Jack worked quite late that night, having an editorial to write for the Banner, and wishing to make it one of his best efforts and something that men would want to keep and refer to in after years as having been instrumental in molding public opinion.

It was after one o'clock when he heard the outer door shut rather more loudly than was necessary, and then a somewhat unsteady step coming up-stairs.

There was something familiar in the step; despite its unsteadiness, and with a sudden paleness he arose and went into the hall.

"Tom," he said, quietly.

There was no answer, but he saw a form pass the head of the stairs and walk waveringly to the rear of the house.

"Tom?"

"Well, what do you want?" asked Tom, in thick tones.

"Good-night."

"Good-night yourself. That all you got to say? Go to bed and don't keep folks awake all night."

Tom's door slammed, and Tom's shoes soon after made a noise as if thrown at the wall, after which a chair was overturned, and there was the sound of a window shade flying to the top with great rapidity, followed by a growl from Tom himself.

Jack did not do any more work that night, but he lay in bed a long time after he had put his light out, thinking deeply.

During the next week Tom came home late three or four nights in succession, and on the last Jack followed him to his room, and said:

"You'll have to stop this, young fellow."

"Stop what, Jack?" asked Tom, smiling, though somewhat abashed by his brother's firm, quiet tone.

"Coming in late and drinking. It's telling on your work. Evans says you are getting careless."

"So you've been spying on me, eh?" answered the younger boy, angrily.

"I told Evans I'd be responsible for you, Tom," said Jack, without the slightest tone of reproach. "Don't do it any more. It would break mother's heart."

"You haven't told her?" gasped Tom.

"No, and I won't if you will stop now."

"You're always so busy, and Suse says boys are no good, and I've got to have some company," said Tom, apologetically. "You can't expect a fellow to always stay in the house."

"No, but I do expect a fellow to respect himself and not come home with the smell of liquor on his breath."

"Ned Elliott does it, and his father's the biggest man in town."

"Never mind what Ned Elliott does. Brace up, old chap. Here, I'll get you some hot water. Got a headache, haven't you?"

"Yes."

Ten minutes later Jack had Tom in bed feeling much more comfortable than he had done when he came in.

"You're a good chap, Jack," said Tom. "You don't nag a fellow to death. I'm awful sorry, and I promise you I'll try and do better at the bank. You ask Evans about me next week."

Jack did not ask Evans the next week.

He heard from him sooner than that.

As he was about to leave the house the next morning, he met the cashier at the door in company with a man whom he had seen occasionally, and who was said to be one of the bank detectives.

"May I see you a few moments, Jack?" asked Mr. Evans.

"Certainly. Will you come in, or will we walk down the street together?"

"I think we would better come in," said the cashier, his companion smiling in a strange sort of way that greatly puzzled the boy.

"Very well. There is no one in the parlor just now. Walk in."

"Shall we be perfectly free from disturbance? It is important that no one should overhear our talk."

"We can sit in my room," said Jack, still more puzzled. "This way."

"This is Mr. Jackson," said the cashier, when they had reached Jack's room, which was at the top of the house, and was both sleeping apartment and study.

"How do?" said the stranger. "This seems to be what one might call a literary work-shop. Sketches? Do you draw, sir?"

"No, those are my sister's. She is very clever. I think."

"We are not likely to be disturbed?" asked the cashier.

"No," and Jack locked the door, his wonder at the cashier's mysterious conduct increasing every instant. "Now, then, will you be kind enough to explain what all this means?"

"Your brother has been working at the bank evenings for a week or more, making up the quarterly accounts."

"Till midnight?" asked Jack.

"No, indeed—only till nine o'clock. What made you think it was so late?"

Mr. Jackson smiled in his peculiar fashion, and Jack realized that he had blundered, though in what manner he could not guess.

"Oh, only till nine?" he said, not answering the cashier's question.

"Yes. Last night one of the smaller safes in the bank—not the large one—was opened and a quantity of money taken therefrom. I thought I had better come to you before making it public."

"To me?" repeated Jack, flushing. "What have I to do with it?" and he removed his glasses, the better to scan his visitor's face.

"Better come out plain, sir," said Jackson.

"You said you would be responsible for your brother's conduct?" said the cashier.

"Yes, I did."

"He is suspected of taking a sum of money from the small safe."

Jack's face grew pale in an instant, but he strove to appear calm, and presently said:

"Was Tom alone in the bank?"

"He was seen to leave it alone at ten o'clock last night. Other sums have been taken recently, small amounts mostly, from the petty cash which is not kept in the safe. Yesterday we placed some marked bills in the safe which was opened."

"And Tom had these marked bills in his possession?" asked Jack, nervously.

"That is what we wish to know," said the cashier. "That is why I came to you first."

"Better state the marks," said Jackson.

"Yes, exactly. Well, here is one of the bills. It was found on the floor. The rest are similarly marked. Do you observe this small red cross in the seal? Look at it with this glass and you will see it more distinctly."

"Yes, I see it," said Jack, putting on his glasses. "It is there," putting his pencil on the mark.

"Quite so. The other bills are similarly marked. Your brother was alone in the bank for an hour last night. He was seen to leave with a package in his hand. This morning the safe is found to have been opened, one marked bill is under his desk and the rest are missing."

"That is not evidence," said Jack. "Why do you suspect Tom? The package might have been anything."

"Better produce the letter," said Jackson.

"Yes, I presume so. This was received this morning. Read it."

Jack took a half-sheet of note paper, which the cashier handed to him, and read as follows:

"Mr. Evans:—If you want to find the stolen money look in T. F.'s desk at his house."

"It is not signed," said Jack, contemptuously. "Only cowards attack a man in this manner. If the money were stolen only last night, how would this person know of it? Doubtless he is the thief himself."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," said the cashier, "for the handwriting is singularly like your brother's."

"I won't believe it," said Jack, impetuously. "Come with me. We'll examine Tom's desk. I said I'd be responsible for him, and I will be."

Jack led the way to his brother's room. The desk was an ordinary affair and stood under a window. It was not locked, and Jack threw back the lid.

There were papers and a few books in it, together with a miscellaneous collection of pens, pencils, blotters, bits of pads, ink erasers, rubbers, and other odds and ends.

In one corner, under some old pads, Jack found a square package only loosely tied up. This came apart as he took it out, and there were revealed two or three bundles of bank notes, and lying upon them, a bill marked as he had seen the one in the cashier's hand.

"What do you think now?" asked Jackson.

"Think!" repeated Jack, turning fiercely upon the man, his

slight form quivering with excitement. "That my brother is innocent! What's more, I mean to prove it!"

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE THIEF WAS DETECTED.

For a few moments the cashier and the detective gazed at Jack with incredulous looks.

"You say you can prove your brother's innocence in the face of all this incriminating evidence?" asked Jackson.

"I said that I would prove it," answered Jack, calmly. "I admit that at first glance it looks bad for Tom, but then all the evidence is circumstantial."

"I don't see how we are going to get around it," said Mr. Evans. "Something must be done."

"Why, it's clear enough that the boy took the money," said Jackson. "Then he became alarmed and wrote this anonymous note."

"The note is not in my brother's hand," said Jack. "It simply resembles it. Do you suppose he would write such a note if he were truly repentant? It is too absurd to think of."

"But how did the money come to be in his desk if he did not put it there?" asked Jackson.

"I haven't settled that point yet."

"Well, we shall have to make an arrest, that's all," said the detective, carelessly. "The evidence is most conclusive."

"I beg that you will not be hasty in this affair, Mr. Evans," said Jack, addressing the cashier, and turning his back on the detective. "Let us suppose that Tom is not guilty. If you arrest him it will be known all over town, and the real offender will have a chance to escape. It is not necessary to arrest Tom. You know where the money is, and you can always put your hands on him. He is not going to run away."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Prove Tom's innocence. I want time for it. Let him keep right on at the bank, under surveillance if you choose, but let no mention of this affair be made. I held myself responsible for the boy when I took him to you, and I shall prove him innocent if I can. If not, then the blame is mine."

"Very sentimental," said Jackson, with a half sneer, "but not at all business-like."

"See here, sir," said Jack, turning to address the detective, "do you know that you are acting under an entirely false premise? Who makes this charge? Someone without manhood enough to sign his name. What evidence have you against Tom? That he left the bank with a package under his arm. You don't know what the package contained. You find this money in his desk. Well? How do you know I did not put it there myself? I have access to the bank, as Mr. Evans will tell you. Tom has a key. Couldn't I take it, let myself in and open the small safe? Why don't you arrest me? The evidence is just as strong against me as it is against Tom."

"All this may be used against you later on," said Jackson. "You'd better be careful what you say."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack, showing impatience for the first time. "Mr. Evans, do you charge Tom with this robbery?"

"No, but I must say that the evidence is rather damaging."

"I admit that. Then you do not give this man authority to arrest Tom?"

"No, I do not," answered the cashier, after a pause.

"Give me a few days," said Jack, "and if no additional facts come out, give me a longer time. Tom is not going to run away. I will see to that."

"We will give you a week," said Mr. Evans, "providing no new evidence against Tom comes out."

"Very well. That is quite satisfactory. Count the money in the package, and then return it to the place where we found it. That will be the best plan."

Jackson looked dissatisfied, but as Mr. Evans seemed to approve the plan, he said nothing and it was adopted.

After his visitors had gone, Jack sat down to think seriously over the matter.

He took the anonymous note and compared it with Tom's writing, having several specimens at hand, finding more differences than resemblances.

"Tom never wrote it," he mused. "I was satisfied of that at the start; now I am more sure of it."

He looked at the affair in all its phases, spending much time upon it, and finally decided upon a course of action, resolving to say nothing to his mother about it, but to keep his own counsel strictly.

Believing Tom innocent he would not question him, but determined to find out how the package of money came to be in his desk.

That anybody but Tom, could have put it there seemed unreasonable, and yet it was possible, as Tom's door was never locked, and there were other persons besides the family in the house.

Tom left the house after supper, saying that he had work to do in the bank, but would be home not later than ten o'clock.

Shortly before ten, Jack stationed himself behind a large tree standing directly in front of the bank building.

At ten o'clock he heard two persons coming down the steps.

"Come and have a drink and a game of cards before you go home," said a voice which Jack knew to be Ned Elliott's.

"No," answered Tom. "I've had all the drinking I'm going to have, and I don't play cards."

"What's the matter, getting good?" sneered young Elliott.

"No, not extra, but I'm going home. I can't afford to play cards the way you fellows play."

"Ah, come on, you can't lose much."

"No," said Tom, firmly. "Good-night."

Jack heard the familiar step grow fainter and knew that Tom had been true to his word.

Ned Elliott stood irresolute for a few minutes and then started off in a direction opposite to that in which Jack knew him to live.

"I'd better have a look at the places he frequents," he thought. "Tom must have been in some of them and it may be necessary to see some of the people who go there."

He easily kept Ned in sight without attracting his attention and after following him for some distance and making several turns he finally saw him enter a place from which came boisterous laughter and the clinking of glasses.

Jack was reluctant to enter a place of that sort, which he knew must be frequented by anything but gentlemen, not only from the locality, but from the character of those he saw go in and out, and the loud noises which came from it.

"There's really no need of my going in," he mused. "I know that he frequents such places, and I'm afraid that our Tom has been here more than once. I don't know really why I followed him here."

As he stood in the darkness watching the door he saw young Marriner, son of the paymaster of the Stonehill quarry, go into the place, accompanied by a young man, with whom he had a slight acquaintance.

"H'm! I always thought he was above such things," he mused. "This is a bad state of affairs. I can't much blame Tom for coming to this place when fellows supposed to be thoroughly respectable do so."

Impelled by some motive, he could not tell what, he waited near the place, having an abhorrence to entering, and yet seeming unable to leave it.

He waited fully an hour and then Ned Elliott and Mar-

riner came out together, both under the influence of drink and both angry at something.

"I never saw such luck," growled Ned. "I'm just cleaned out. I wish I'd got Tom to come. I'd 've made something out of him at all events."

"Can't you get the stuff you left with him and try it again to-morrow?" asked Marriner, and Jack was nearly startled into an exclamation of surprise.

"What stuff?" snarled Ned, as he walked on, his companion following.

They were both too much excited to notice that Jack was close behind.

"Oh, you know, the stuff you got out of the bank and gave to Tom to keep."

"How'd you know I got it?" muttered Ned, angrily.

"Oh, that's all right. You didn't dare to keep it and you gave it to Tom to take care of. Nice job that was! He don't know what it was, oh, no!" and the young fellow laughed heartily.

"Well, he don't!" broke out Ned. "Tom Foster is soft and easily led, and all that, but he wouldn't do what you and I would. You know very well that he had nothing to do with taking the stuff."

"Oh, I don't know," said the other, laughing. "He ain't so good. You'd better count your stuff when you get it back."

"You lie!" cried Ned, fiercely. "You know Tom wasn't in it. You would not have dared to hint the thing to him. Tom Foster is no thief."

Jack was glad to hear Ned say this, but he did not think it wise to interfere till he had heard more.

"That's all right," said the other, "but what's the matter with fastening it on him? They're sure to find it out in the bank. He's got the stuff and it's easy enough to put the bank folks onto him, that is, after we get it. He won't say you gave it to him."

"I know he won't, because he promised, and—how the dickens do you know so much, anyhow? You weren't around when I gave it to him."

"Ah, go on, you told me so yourself," was the quick answer, but, somehow, Jack knew it was a falsehood.

Ned broke out in an angry retort, and the two quickly came to blows, Jack stepping back into the shadow to avoid being seen.

"So Ned Elliott is the thief," he thought. "How can I expose him? His father is thoroughly respected, and then there is Kitty. She would never speak to me if I publicly exposed him. I must save Tom, but how shall I do it? Young Marriner, too? Who would have suspected it? I must be careful how I act, for a public exposure might ruin their lives forever. They must be punished, but not disgraced."

The next morning Jack went into Tom's room as his brother was dressing, and asked:

"Tom, who gave you that package in your desk?"

Tom flushed, but made no answer.

"It contains stolen property, and you are suspected. Where did you get it?"

"I cannot tell," said Tom, in a whisper.

"Was it given to you to take care of?"

"I can't speak about it, Jack."

"Why not?"

"I have given my word."

"But if you are accused?"

"It will be just the same."

Jack grasped his brother by the hand warmly, and said, hastily:

"Tom, old chap, you're as true as steel, and I'm proud of

(Continued on page 20.)

Pluck and Luck

NEW YORK, JANUARY 25, 1911.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

A policeman in Worcester, England, "shuffled off this mortal coil" about two years ago. His successor bought the dead man's uniform, and was given the dead man's beat. Then he went to board with the widow, and he has just married her.

A canvass was recently made of the electrical engineering alumni of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, to discover what salary the men who have taken up this line of work can demand. The average incomes ran from \$1,000 per year on the second year to \$2,000 on the eighth year, over \$5,000 on the sixteenth, and \$9,000 on the twentieth year. The highest paid men reached \$8,000 on the fourteenth year after graduation, while the lowest paid men took twenty years to reach a salary of \$5,000.

Water birds which are ordinarily able to float high on the water can also sink at will by expelling the air which is enclosed within the film of feathers surrounding their bodies, thus making them heavier than water. This mechanical trick on the part of diving birds is probably familiar to all who have watched the kingfisher at close quarters and have noted the sudden contraction in the bird's apparent size as it takes the plunge. This is much more easily observed in the case of the starling, which sometimes imitates the kingfisher by plunging into water for food. The shrinkage of the bird in apparent size is very apparent when, after hovering above the surface, it turns downward to dive.

There are many strange and curious animals thrown up in quantities on the seashore after storms which an observant wanderer may pick up as he strolls along the sand. The subsiding waves, one after another, briskly flow to his feet, and deliver a little sample of the weeds and other growths uprooted in shallow depths beyond the low-tide mark. For the big waves of a stormy sea are not merely surface appearances; they tear and rend the sea bottom of the shallow water beyond the line of "breakers," dislodging all sorts of adherent animals from the hidden rocks, and even turning over the sandy bottom in which burrowing worms, as a rule, remain safely housed, but are now carried helplessly along by the force of the deep hidden disturbance, and thrown alive on to the beach. Many a rare prize is thus obtained by the naturalist, for the waves will search and bring the spoil to shore from submarine rockclefts and sand beds into which the "dredge" cannot penetrate.

The five cent restaurant established in San Francisco for the benefit of working women is well worth imitating. Here, between two hundred and three hundred girls and women are daily fed at noonday. Five women make up the entire working force of the establishment, which is a model in its way. The food is wholesome and honestly prepared, yet wisely limits its fare to three dishes daily—fresh and sweet bread and butter, tea and coffee, and a varied dish of soup, meat and fish for each day. There are no waiters for the tables, but each patron must call for her own plate at a window. When she has not the five cents to spare she can pay two cents for a cup of tea or coffee to drink with the bite of food she has brought from home. The dining room is open between the hours of eleven and two o'clock each day in the week, except Sunday and holidays.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

Employer—And where did you get your commercial education? Miss Wood B. Employed—I did the Christmas shopping for our entire family.

Little Girl—Mother, is Uncle John deaf? Mother—No, dear. Why? Little Girl—Every time he gives me five cents he says, "What do you say?" and I'm never saying a word.

"I have come to the conclusion that we all really like to be blessed," observed he Wise Guy. "I suppose that is why men have wives and wives have cooks," added the Simple Mug.

"Papa," said Freddie, "what is a fortification?" "Why, a big fort," replied his father. "Well, papa, is a ratification a big—" "I am busy now, dear," replied father, as he escaped.

"I wonder why the English settlers came to name the town 'Boston.'" "Probably because it began with 'B.'" "What has that to do with it?" "Well, that's the beginning of 'beans,' you know."

"You haven't much of a memory for dates," said the conversational boarder. "Nope," replied Farmer Corntossel. "I used to have. But it interferes with business when you're sellin' spring chickens."

One of the neatest of parliamentary apologies was that of an irate member of the House who described another as "not having even the manners of a pig." At the cry of "Withdraw" he did so. "I withdraw and apologize, and beg to say that the honorable member has the manners of a pig."

The old friends had had three days together. "You have a pretty place here, John," remarked the guest on the morning of his departure. "But it looks a bit bare yet." "Oh, that's because the trees are so young," answered the host comfortably. "I hope they'll have grown to a good size before you come again."

She pulled at one piece first this way, then that, wetting it and rubbing it with her fingers to try if the colors were fast. Then she paused awhile as if not yet satisfied. At last she cut off a piece with a pair of scissors and, handing it to a gawky looking girl of about 16, standing by her side, said: "Here, 'Liza Jane, you chew that an' see if it fades." 'Liza Jane raised it to her mouth and solemnly went to work.

THE MISER'S ENEMY

By John Sherman

My name is George Bland, and I am in the insurance business as a traveling agent.

The principal customers of our company are farmers and village store and hotel keepers.

One day, as I was returning to New York on the Erie Railway, a flashy-dressed man entered the car at Middletown.

There was a vacant seat beside me, and as the man approached to take it, a smile of recognition flashed from his eyes.

I did not respond, as the fellow was a stranger to me.

"Where are you bound for, Bob?" he asked, in a confidential tone of voice, after he had taken his seat.

"For New York, but my name is not Bob."

"The mischief it isn't? You don't mean to say you want to cut an old friend, Bob Brown?"

"My name is not Bob Brown, and I'm sure I never met you before."

"Well, now, if that isn't what I call big cheek. Perhaps you don't remember the last racket we worked together? Come, now, none of your fooling."

I took the fellow for a sharper; but I could not imagine what game he was up to in thus claiming my acquaintance.

It may be as well to state that I had never been taken for a greenhorn.

On the other hand, my friends say that I am one of the sharpest-looking fellows they ever met.

An idea occurred to me that I would draw the fellow out, and see what he was made of, as well as what he was up to.

"I don't remember the racket you allude to," I responded. "Now, it seems to me that I have met you before."

"I should think you had. None of your confounded tricks will Bill Phair, old fellow, or I'll get mad."

"That's all right, Bill. I thought I'd try you a little. What are you doing up here?"

"I've been looking at a spanking team of bays I'm thinking of buying. I suppose you know I've made some ten-strikes lately?"

"I heard something about it. Have you given up business altogether?"

"Not much. What are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm working the same old game. But things are dull."

"I could put you on a good lay, Bob, if you will work the racket with me."

"What is it?"

We were conversing in low tones, and as the train was rattling along, our fellow passengers could not hear a word of our conversation.

"Will you rip in with me if I tell you?"

"If I don't, I'll not give you away."

"Oh, I know blamed well you're not that kind of a cove, Bob. Do you know that town we have just left?"

"Middletown? Yes, I have often stopped there for a day or so."

"Very good. Well, just about a mile outside the town there's an old cove named Morton living, and he's got lots of the shiners. He's as mean as dirt; and he's afraid to keep his money in the bank. You twig?"

"Of course," I replied.

I was now fully satisfied that the fellow was a successful burglar; and that he had taken me for an old pal.

"It will be the easiest job we ever worked together. There's

nobody in the house with the old coon but an old nigger about as helpless as himself."

"It will be an easy job, then. When do you propose to work it?"

"Next Monday I'm going up again about the horses. You come with me, and we'll fix old Morton that night."

"Not lay him out?"

"There'll be no occasion for that. We can overpower the old coon easily, for he's very old and feeble."

"All right. I am with you."

I cast a side look at my new acquaintance to see if he was "getting me on a string!"

He was either deeply in earnest, or he was a practical joker, amusing himself for the time by making a stranger believe that he was a desperate character.

I was soon convinced that he was not assuming a false character—that he was really a burglar, and that he had mistaken me for an old friend.

"The likeness must be a remarkable one," I reflected, "when a sharp fellow like this is taken in by it."

As we rolled along towards the city, I had formed a plan of action.

I would accompany the burglar to Middletown on Monday; I would go with him to the house of the old miser; and I would take good care to have officers on hand to seize us while committing the robbery.

We conversed freely as we traveled along, and I played my part so well that Bill Phair continued to feel convinced that I was no other than Bob Brown, his old pal.

I soon noticed that the rascal had been drinking freely; and he informed me that he had been on a spree for a week.

As we passed Paterson Bill Phair fell asleep, and I had to shake him up when we reached Jersey City.

It was growing dark as we crossed the ferry to Courtland street, and we agreed to sup together.

Just as we were leaving the boat, the president of the insurance company stepped up to me, saying:

"How are you, Mr. Bland? I trust you've got a wallet full of risks."

"I've been doing pretty well, sir."

"That's right. You will be at the office in the morning?"

"Certainly, Mr. Blake."

The president hastened away to catch the ferry, determined to offer him an explanation to the effect that the gentleman had been mistaken in me, and so on; but I could not find him.

Then I hastened to my Brooklyn home, laughing in my sleeve at the burglar.

I had made up my mind to pay a visit to Middletown on the following Monday, and put old Morton and the officers of the place on their guard.

I had also resolved that I would not mention the matter to my wife, as she was a very nervous creature, and she would be alarmed if she knew that I was in any manner connected with such a character.

I took my wife to the theater that night.

As we neared our cottage home, which is situated in a deserted part of the city, I noticed two men standing on the corner.

They wore soft felt hats, and the collars of their coats were drawn up to their eyes, although it was not a cold night.

Paying very little attention to the fellows, we passed along to the door of the cottage.

Just as I was in the act of opening the door, my wife uttered a cry of alarm.

Before I could turn around I received a stunning blow on the side of the head from some murderous weapon, and I was stretched on the ground insensible.

When I recovered my senses, I found myself lying on my own bed, and my wife was sitting beside me.

It was daylight.

"My dear George," she said, as she embraced me, "I am so happy to see you look at me in that way at last."

"At last! How long have I been asleep?"

"You have been insensible for over four days, my poor fellow."

"What day is this?"

"Tuesday."

"Good gracious! What has been the matter with me?"

"You came very near dying from the blow that villain gave you."

"Did they catch the rascal?"

"They did not."

"Then I will catch him."

The doctor soon called, and he informed me that I would be all right in a few days.

On the following Saturday morning I started for Middletown.

I there learned that old Morton, the miser, had been robbed of a large amount of money on the previous Monday night, and that no trace of the burglars could be found.

I determined on paying the old man a visit.

I also learned that a stranger from New York, calling himself John Fitch, had purchased a fine pair of bay trotters in the neighborhood on the previous Monday, and that an old gentleman was with him at the purchase.

They left Middletown on Tuesday morning.

Strange to say, the old miser did not make much fuss about the loss of his money, and he declared that he would not employ a detective in the matter.

Curiosity prompted me to pay a visit to old Morton.

I walked out to his place in the afternoon, and I found the old negro splitting wood in the yard.

The house was a large, old-fashioned building, with wide hallways and large windows.

"Can I see Mr. Morton?" I asked of the gray-haired old negro.

"Guess not, boss. He am in bed."

"I would like to see him on business very much," I said, slipping a silver half-dollar into the old man's hand.

"Jest wait till I see, boss. He might be up now."

The negro returned in a few moments, and said to me:

"Go right in dar, boss."

I entered a large, wide hallway, and I had scarcely closed the door after me, when a sharp voice demanded:

"What do you want with me?"

"I want to see if I cannot effect some insurance on your——"

"Can you insure me against unnatural robbers?" interrupted the old man, as he appeared at the end of the passage, arrayed in a long night-gown and sleeping-cap. "Come in this way."

I followed the old man into a large room, which was lighted by two large windows.

The old man was standing near one of these windows when I entered.

The moment his eyes fell on me, he started back, exclaiming:

"Rascal! what brings you here again?"

I thought the old fellow was out of his mind, yet I advanced towards him in a conciliatory manner, saying:

"You are evidently mistaken, Mr. ——"

"No, you wretch, I am not mistaken. Don't come near me, robber."

"Robber!" I cried, holding up my hand in protest. "I am not a robber."

"Get away from here, or I will have you arrested. Did you

not get enough from me Monday night, you ungrateful dog? Oh, will you never be satisfied?"

"There is some grave mistake here, Mr. Morton. My name is George Bland; I am an insurance agent, and I am well-known in Middletown."

"I don't care where you are known, or what name you are known under. I know you as my greatest enemy—my unnatural son. Get away, or I will send you to prison."

"I protest that you are mistaken, Mr. Morton. Be kind enough to tell me by what name your son is known?"

"You scamp, did not your vile companion call you Bill Brown when you were here to rob me last Monday night?"

"My dear sir, if you will look at me closer, you will see that I am not your erring son. Be kind enough to examine my features at the window."

I approached the old man as I spoke, and looked at him with a confident smile.

"Bless my eyes!" he cried, as he examined my countenance with his keen blue eyes. "Let me see your teeth?"

I opened my mouth and displayed a perfect set of natural teeth.

"They are all false teeth," said the old man, in a puzzled manner. "And yet, now I come to look close, there is a difference in the face. But 'tis one of your tricks, you unnatural wretch. You are my son, and you came here to rob me again, and to murder me, so as to get my money."

"I swear to you that my name is George Bland, as I can soon prove."

"Bland—Bland?" cried the old fellow, staring at me in bewilderment.

"Yes, George Bland. I was born in England, and I came to this country when I was a small boy, with my mother."

"Your mother? What was your mother's name?" asked the old man, growing more and more agitated.

"Elizabeth Bland."

"Elizabeth! How old are you?"

"I will soon be forty."

"Good Heavens! And what is the name of the place where you were born?"

"I was born in a villa three miles outside of Manchester—as my mother told me before she died."

"And your father—what of him?"

"I know nothing about him, except that he left my mother, when I was three years old, to go to Australia. He took my twin-brother with him, and——"

"Merciful Heavens!" exclaimed the old miser, in almost frantic tones. "Can you tell me why your father deserted your mother?"

"She told me he was jealous of her, and without cause."

"I was—I was! I was a mad, jealous fool, and I was fond of gold. Oh, George, you are my son. My real name is William Thornton, and your mother's name was Elizabeth Bland before her marriage. You have a twin-brother, who is a wretch. He is a burglar and a—— What is it, Jeff?"

The old negro handed his master a sealed telegram, saying:

"Dar's no answer, sah."

"Open that, George," the old man said, handing me the dispatch.

I opened the telegram, and read:

"New York, March —, 18—.

"Mr. Morton: Your son was killed last night in a row with Bill Phair. Bill Phair is dying. You will find the body at the morgue. Johnson."

We hastened to New York, and we found my twin-brother's body at the morgue.

Even in death he had a very close resemblance to me.

My jealous father died six months after, and I became the inheritor of his property.

(Continued from page 16.)

you. I know the thief, but I do not wish to betray him publicly. His secret is safe with you, I know. That package contains money stolen from the bank, and the person who entrusted it to your care is the thief."

Tom trembled and said in an awed tone:

"You did not suspect me, Jack? How did you know I had it? When was it taken? Who accused me of it? You don't believe it, do you Jack?"

"No, a million times no! Never mind how I learned about it. You have had a narrow escape, Tom. I'm glad you were so firm last night. I know now that you'll keep away from such places. Say no more about it. Mother doesn't know and shall not. You have come out of this as good as gold, Tom, and I trust that you may never again be in such danger."

That forenoon Ned Elliott was called into the cashier's private office, finding besides Mr. Evans, Jack Foster.

"Ned," said Jack, suddenly, "you have robbed the bank and entrusted my brother with the stolen money, sealing his lips by a promise exacted when he did not know the truth. If we do not expose you, will you go away and never come back till you can return an honest man?"

"Yes!" gasped Ned. "I will!"

CHAPTER XI.

A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

There was another matter to be disposed of in connection with the robbery at the bank, and this was the question of the anonymous note sent to the cashier.

The money in the package found in Tom's desk was not all that was taken from the bank, and the next thing was to find the remainder.

Jack had repeated the conversation he had heard the previous night to Mr. Evans, and the latter agreed with him that young Marriner was implicated in the robbery.

Ned Elliott returned to his desk, and after some little time had elapsed, Marriner was sent for.

Jack had talked the affair over very freely with the cashier, who had consented to let him act as he saw fit in the matter, and so when the young clerk came in the boy suddenly thrust the anonymous letter under his nose, and said sharply:

"What object had you in wishing to throw the blame of your misdeeds on my brother? Has he ever injured you in any way?"

Marriner turned white, trembled violently, stammered a few unintelligible words, and then blurted:

"I didn't write that letter. I never saw it before. It isn't my writing anyhow. What have I to do with it? I didn't know that any money was stolen. Who lost it?"

"Marriner," said Mr. Evans, "a certain conversation which you and someone else held last night near Johnson's saloon on Water street, shortly before midnight, was overheard. Perhaps you can explain it."

"H'm! so Elliott has split on me, has he? You'd better ask him about that letter. He wrote it in order to put the thing on young Tom."

"It will be best for you to tell the truth," said Jack, quietly. "Ned Elliott has said nothing about you. He has admitted his own share in the robbery, but has implicated no one else. I heard you suggest to him last night to try and shift the blame on Tom. Now then, did you write that note?"

"I suppose I did," blurted the other. "What of it? Ned got more of the stuff than I did. I overheard him ask Tom to take care of the package, and I meant to get square on somebody. Tom didn't have anything to do with it. What are you going to do about it? If you arrest me, you'll have to lock Ned up, too."

"You have not only betrayed your trust," said Mr. Evans, "but you have attempted to blacken the fair name of an innocent person. Were it not that I have no desire to publicly shame your father, who is a thoroughly honorable man, I would make your offense known. There is also another reason. Jack Foster, whose brother you tried to implicate, desires that you be given another chance."

Marriner said nothing, hanging his head in shame, his blustering manner being entirely put to flight.

The young man broke down utterly and asked to be given another chance, to be allowed to remain, begging piteously that his father be allowed to remain in ignorance, and promising to restore all that he had taken.

To all this Mr. Evans gave a firm denial, and Marriner was told to prepare to leave the town at once.

The two young men left town that day, Ned immediately after the interview in the cashier's private room and Marriner that evening, and the affair was concluded.

Tom took Elliott's place in the bank, and did most satisfactory work, so much so that Mr. Evans declared that his promotion would certainly be rapid.

Phil was nearing the end of his first year at college; Susie was industriously pursuing her art studies; Tom was working steadily at the bank; the younger children were at school, and the big house was full of well-paying boarders, so that the late spring found the Foster family in much better circumstances than they had been in a year previous.

The reports that came from Phil occasionally were not of the best, and Jack spent many anxious hours thinking things over, and wondering what could be done.

There were debts hinted at, and there were troubles with the faculty, there was a falling off in class standing, and there were other things guessed at rather than known.

Finally Phil came home a month before the usual summer vacation, and said briefly that he was tired of college life.

"That is not the reason," said Jack, who was present when he arrived. "What has happened?"

"Nothing that you can understand," said Phil, loftily.

"You have been suspended for something," said Jack. "What is it? I must know all about it."

"Oh, indeed!" sneered Phil. "Are you paying my bills, pray, Mr. Jack, that you assume such an authority over me?"

"Yes, he is," said Mrs. Foster.

"You'll keep up, I suppose, so as to take the examinations for next term?" said Jack inquiringly.

"Oh, I suppose so," muttered Phil. "Since you are paying the bills, I suppose I've got to do as you say. It's a nice thing to be dependent on one's younger brother, isn't it? Takes all the vim out of a fellow. Why didn't you tell me, mother! Now, I suppose he'll be lording it over me all the time. I've a mind to cut the whole business."

"You're talking very foolishly, old chap, and making a deal of unnecessary noise," said Jack, taking up a book.

Phil was at first chagrined to find that the boy whom he had always called the lazy one of the family, had been paying his expenses, and he was foolish enough to resent it, but he finally became more sensible and took his brother's suggestions in a proper spirit.

Somehow Tom got at the truth of the matter, and upbraided Phil for his lack of feeling.

"You think a lot of Jack, don't you?" said Phil, sneeringly, although he felt the force of Tom's argument.

"Yes, I do, and do you know why? I got to going wild myself, and he got me out of what might have been a bad scrape, talked straight and honest to me, and I'm obliged to him for it."

Phil made no reply to this, and Tom having said all that he cared to, relapsed into silence.

Jack's mother spoke to him about this time, telling him that he was working too hard, and that he must certainly take more exercise.

Jack said he would, and the very next day he borrowed Tom's wheel and started for a spin down the road.

He passed Bald Head and continued on, intending to take another road on the return and make about twenty miles, which would be quite enough for an afternoon's run.

Coming back he took a road which he was told would lead him along the foot of the mountain and to his own town, and he rode on at an easy pace, not caring to tire himself.

The road seemed to ascend more than he thought it should, and finally, after climbing one rather steep ascent, he noticed some heavy black clouds gathering rapidly and increased his speed, so as to reach town before the storm broke.

"I must find a shelter of some sort," he mused, and in another moment, to his intense surprise, he found himself in front of the mysterious brown hut, though how he happened to be there he could not tell.

He pushed open the door of the hut, taking his wheel with him, and had hardly entered before he heard the rain dashing with great violence on the roof of the hut, while at the same time there was a terrific peal of thunder accompanied by a flash so brilliant that it lighted up the whole interior of the hut.

Now he could see a large room, growing wider as it opened before him, a fire-place, a shelf, a table and one or two windows.

He struck a match as the place became dark and advanced, passing into what seemed to be an inner room.

In the floor, running right across it, was a deep groove an inch wide, and above he could see a similar one, the two being evidently there for some purpose.

On a table was an old brass oil lamp, and this he lighted and pursued his investigations.

At one side of the cave room, hung upon well oiled rollers and fitting into the grooves above and below, was a solid oaken door with an iron knob a few inches from the edge.

Jack moved this out a foot or so and examined the side facing the hut room.

It was covered thickly with cement, so as to give it the appearance of a rough wall.

"This, then, is the wall I struck against when I sprang to Kitty's assistance," he mused. "This is the curtain that Jim told me about."

At that moment he heard voices proceeding from some point in the cave beyond.

CHAPTER XII.

JACK IS DECOYED.

There was evidently someone in the cave besides himself, and Jack had no notion of risking discovery by remaining.

He quickly placed the lamp on the table, blew it out, and made his way rapidly toward the door of the hut.

Then he noticed a gleam of light, and, directly afterward, saw two men come into the inner room, one of them bearing a lighted candle.

"Hallo!" cried the other, "we have a visitor, it seems."

"Yes, and it's that four-eyed young meddler that was here before."

"Good afternoon," said Jack. "I came in here to escape the storm. Decidedly unpleasant weather, isn't it?"

"What did you come here again for?" demanded Bob. "You got away twice all right. Wasn't that enough?"

"I came here as upon my second visit, quite by accident, and had no intention of spying upon you."

"Well, it'll be three times and out this time. You've come

here once too often, my beauty. Draw the curtain, Joe. There's no need for it now."

Joe closed off the hut room by sliding the oak door and fastening it with a heavy bolt, after which he took a seat, lighted a pipe, and smoked in silence.

Jack watched his opportunity.

He suddenly seized the lamp from the table and struck Bob across the face with it, shattering the glass and bending the bars with the force of the blow.

Bob uttered a cry of pain, threw out his arms to seize the daring boy, and overturned the candle, which fell on the floor, and was at once extinguished.

"Don't let him get away, Joe!" cried Bob. "Don't kill him; we haven't got through with him yet."

Jack knew the direction of the hut, and sprang toward the dividing door, finding the bolt almost at once.

In an instant he had drawn it and sent the door sliding noiselessly back.

At that moment there was a sharp click, and the door of the hut was opened, admitting a flood of light.

"Stop him!" cried Joe.

Two or three men entered the hut, but their eyes had not become accustomed to the light, coming as they did from bright sunlight to the semi-twilight of the cave.

They sprang forward, and Jack, seizing his wheel, rushed past them, slamming the door after him.

The storm had ceased as suddenly as it had come up, and all the mountain was now bathed in the most glorious sunlight.

Jack made a flying mount and went scorching down the road, being beyond the reach of a pistol bullet in a few moments.

He was still considerably excited when he reached home, although not outwardly so, Mrs. Foster failing to observe anything unusual in his manner.

The storm which had so suddenly cleared away on the day of Jack's last visit to Bald Head broke out afresh after his escape down the mountains, but was confined to that locality, and did not reach the town beyond.

Jack knew nothing of this till the following day when he met the unprepossessing dwarf on a by street of the town.

Jim laughed and showed those long, yellow teeth of his, clutched the boy by the arm, and said:

"Ho, ho, you won't go there again, my boy. You'll have to go somewhere else to find them. You won't find them in the brown hut any more."

"You mean that lawless crowd who infests the mountain? They have fled, then?"

"There was another storm, or the same one came again," said Jim. "The hut was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The rocks at the mouth of the cave were split and thrown down. The gang's house is broken up and the boys have gone away. Many were killed. Ho, ho, you won't want to follow them, will you?"

"It is the vengeance of Heaven," said Jack.

The dwarf's story of the destruction of the brown hut was confirmed a few hours later by some men who had been in the neighborhood and had seen the ruins.

They had ventured into the cave, which was revealed by the destruction of the hut, but for a short distance only, as the rocks had fallen down in such a way as to prevent a thorough examination.

At the beginning of the next week, the Continental Theater Company, to the manager of which Jack had sold his play the year before, visited the town again to play a week's engagement.

Jack had corresponded with the manager in the meantime,

and had sold him another play which was now to be produced, as well as making arrangements for producing a third.

This piece was now ready and the management, upon reading it over, agreed to take it and put it in rehearsal at once.

Jack attended the last rehearsal of his second play and when it was put on, went behind the scenes, visiting the principal actors in their dressing-rooms, and taking in all the little details of life behind the footlights.

At the end of the second act of the play there was a storm of applause, and every member of the company was called before the curtain.

Jack stood in the wings listening to the applause and pleased at it, but having no desire to acknowledge his part in the evening's success.

Presently the manager raised his hand to secure silence, and said:

"My friends, I am greatly pleased at the praise you bestow upon my company and myself, but there is one who must not be forgotten upon this occasion. I refer to the author of the play of the evening. He also wrote the piece which succeeded so well here last season. His name was then kept secret, but I beg leave to present for your applause Mr. John Foster, the author."

Jack was entirely unprepared for this announcement, and the manager led him in front of the curtain before he realized what had happened.

The applause was renewed, and was more enthusiastic than before, many in the audience recognizing Jack, and being thoroughly astonished to find that he was the author.

The summer passed, and Phil, who had been studying diligently all that time, returned to college with the evident determination to improve his opportunities and not waste his time as he had done the previous term.

It was the last night of the year, and Jack was sitting in his room reading, by a shaded lamp, when a servant entered with a letter.

"The man is waiting for an answer," she said, as Jack opened the envelope.

The note was short and read as follows:

"Dear Jack: I am in trouble. Come to the bank at once.
"Tom."

"All right, I'll see him," said Jack, and hurrying down to the front door he hastily put on his hat and overcoat.

Opening the door he saw no one, and concluded that the messenger had thought his task accomplished and had gone home.

He left the house in haste, and almost ran to the bank, despite the heavy snow which had been falling since dark, and which was still descending steadily.

Almost adjoining the bank was a small chapel and this was lighted, the sound of singing being heard within, a small congregation being gathered to hold a watch meeting on the last night of the year.

There was a dim light burning in the bank and Jack sprang up the steps, wondering what new trouble Tom had got into.

To his surprise he found the door open, and stepping inside he was suddenly seized, a gag thrust into his mouth and his arms held tightly to his sides.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW TOM USED HIS WITS.

Jack was hurried forward, the door being shut behind him, and was taken to a room in the rear of the main banking room, out of sight from the street.

He was placed in a chair, to which he was slightly bound, and then one of his captors, of whom there seemed to be several, removed the gag, and said:

"We've got you now, Mr. Jack, and we don't intend to let you get away. Do you know what we mean to do with you?"

"I'm sure I don't," said Jack, recognizing the speaker as the man Bob, whom he had struck down on the occasion of his last visit to the hut on Bald Head. "You are capable of anything."

"We are going to rob the bank, and you and your brother are going to be accused of it."

Jack was taken into the main banking room and here, to his great astonishment, he found Tom, bound, a man seated in the shadow covering him with a pistol.

"I could not help writing the note, Jack," said Tom, in a low tone. "They would have killed me."

"Never mind, old man," said Jack, cheerily. "It may not be as bad as you fear."

"Do you know about these lower vaults, Dick?" Bob asked one of the men.

"Yes; the governor told me about them. They never have much in 'em, though."

"You're mistaken," said Tom. "Nearly all the bank's money is there. Don't you suppose I ought to know? What am I in the bank for, if not to notice things? You'll make a bigger haul by getting in there than by bothering with this vault."

"Come on," said Dick, "you know the way, lead ahead. Oh, I'll take your arm, my fine man. You needn't think you're going to get away from us so easy."

"You go down by that door yonder," said Tom. "It raises, and there's a spiral staircase under it. I've got a key to fit it."

In a far corner, near the vault, there was an iron door set in the floor.

Tom unlocked and then raised it by means of an iron ring.

Dick and Tom descended the winding stairs, followed by two of the men bearing tools, and then Bob commanded Jack to go ahead.

"What'll I do with the door, young 'un?" asked the outlaw, standing on the steps holding the trap door open with one hand.

Jack had reached the foot of the stairs and Tom was close beside him.

"Let her fall," said Tom. "I've got the key, you know."

There was a heavy fall and a sharp click.

Jack felt his hand clutched quickly and then heard Tom whisper:

"Quick! Keep me in sight!"

Instantly he dashed across the cellar, Jack close behind.

He kept close to his brother, who suddenly turned and seized him as a sharp click was heard.

Tom dragged him swiftly forward. He felt a breath of cold air on his cheek, and then there was a sharp click again and total darkness.

"Now we're all right," Tom said.

"Where are we?" asked Jack.

"Under the church. Their cellar is next to ours, although the buildings don't touch."

"And the outlaws can't follow us?"

"No. That door can hardly be noticed from the other side. They are locked in, for the trap has a spring lock and cannot be opened without a key."

At that moment there was a tremendous pounding on the iron door separating the two cellars.

Tom suddenly stumbled and fell, dragging Jack after him.

"What's the matter?"

"There's a flight of stairs. I fell on the bottom step. This must lead into the church. Come along."

At that moment they heard the sound of an organ and of voices singing a hymn.

Mingled with these sounds came the pounding upon the iron door.

At last Tom reached the top, finding a door which was latched but not locked.

Jack sprang past Tom, threw open the door, and burst into the chapel, crying out:

"Burglars in the bank, burglars in the bank!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A STARTLING CONFESSION.

The handful of men and women assembled in the little chapel to welcome the coming of a new year by songs of praise and by heartfelt prayer, were terribly startled when Jack Foster appeared among them.

"Come on, a dozen of you," added Tom. "A band of determined men can easily capture them. There are only four of the ruffians."

The sexton of the little church came forward with a long poker in his hand.

"Which cellar are they in?" he asked.

"The one under this back room. We got up by way of the stairs."

With that he hurried into the ante-room, followed by Tom,

There was heard a sudden crash below at that moment, and in another instant came the sound of hurrying footsteps on the stairs.

The door leading to the cellar was thrown violently open, and a man appeared.

Crash!

Jack dealt the fellow a stunning blow on the head, and brought him to the floor in an instant.

A second man, coming up from the cellar in hot haste, stumbled over the prostrate body of his fellow criminal and fell heavily.

"Lie where you are or you're a dead man!" cried Jack, springing forward. "Quick, Tom, look out for more of the scoundrels."

The sexton and two or three men from the chapel now appeared, and as a third man came rushing up from the cellar he fell right into their arms.

"There's another," said Jack. "Look out for him."

The men who had come with the sexton held two of the burglars, the one whom Jack had struck down still lying senseless on the floor.

The sexton had left the room on Jack's suggestion, and the boy, turning to Tom, said:

"Go and find a rope somewhere, old man, so as to secure these fellows. Then send somebody out for a policeman."

The sexton presently returned and reported that the fourth man had escaped. "It's Dick," said Tom. "I can describe him perfectly. I had opportunity enough to observe him when he was keeping guard over me."

Tom soon returned with a policeman, but stated that he had been unable to find a rope anywhere about the building.

"You won't need one now," said Jack. "These men and the officer will be enough to take the prisoners to the station. You go with them, Tom, and swear out a complaint."

The two prisoners were led away, each guarded by two strong men, Tom accompanying the party, Jack and the sexton being left alone.

Jack knelt beside the man he had knocked down, and who appeared to be seriously injured.

The man moved uneasily at this moment and opened his eyes.

"This is a church," said the injured man, "isn't it? Send for the minister—quick!"

He fell back, gasping for breath, and Jack, with a great fear at his heart, hurried from the room.

The minister was dismissing the congregation, and Jack hurriedly stated his errand.

"I will come at once," said the man, following Jack in a few moments.

"Do you fear death, my poor man?" asked the minister, kneeling by Bob's side.

"Yes; but it'll be easier if I tell what's on my mind. Put your ear close, Jack. I want to tell you something."

Jack knelt with his head close to Bob's.

"There's a man been meaning to have revenge on you for what your father done to him," whispered the man, weakly. "He's been at the head of the gang on Bald Head for years, and he's a gentleman, just as I told you, last time we met. His name is——"

"Yes?" muttered Jack.

"Ezra Elliott!"

Jack was thunderstruck at the strange confession of Bob and could scarcely believe that he had heard aright.

"What!" he gasped. "Do you mean to tell me that—no, it is impossible. Tell me again, who is this man?"

Bob had either fainted or lapsed into unconsciousness, for he made no answer and lay on the floor like one dead.

Jack ran for a doctor and succeeded in rousing one after a long trial, taking the man back with him to the church.

The doctor made a careful examination of the wounded robber, and at last said:

"The man is not dead, but he needs care and attention. Who is he?"

"He was a burglar," said Jack; "but if he can be restored, that should not matter."

"No," said the minister, "it should not. Cure him if possible. He may reform."

The prisoner was allowed to remain in the church till morning, as the night was too wild and stormy to allow of his removal.

Jack did not see him till late in the afternoon, although he had been told that he was improving and would certainly live.

He saw the man alone, and asked:

"What did you tell me last night in the church? You said that a man meant to do me an injury because of things my father had done to him. Who was it?"

"Don't know anything about it," said the man, in a sulky tone. "I never said nothing to you. You fetched me one on the head, I know that, and that's all."

"But you did say——"

"Never said nothing, I tell you," said Bob, and after that he refused to answer any and all of Jack's questions, and the boy at last left him, convinced that it was useless to try and make him speak.

The bank officials all praised Jack for what he had done, but he disclaimed any credit, and said it should be given to Tom.

The door between the bank and the chapel, the existence of which had been quite forgotten, it was said, was removed, and the space walled up with stone and cement, so as to prevent any future visits to the vault.

"I don't quite understand," said Jack to Tom, "how your key fitted both doors when the claim is made that the existence of the door into the church was forgotten. Your key is not an old one, is it?"

"No, it is of quite a new design."

"Let me see it, Tom."

Tom handed the key to his brother, and the latter laid it on a piece of white paper and drew its outlines with a fine pointed pencil.

"What are you doing, Jack?"

"You are not the only one that has a key to the vault?"

"No, there are two or three."

"Who has them?"

"Evans has one. I don't know who has the others. Why did you take the outline?"

"I'll tell you some day, Tom," replied Jack, carelessly.

A night or so after this, when Tom was sitting with Jack, he suddenly put his hand in his pocket, handed a key to his brother, and said:

"You may have that, Jack. They've changed the lock on the trap door, and this is of no further use to me."

"Thanks," said Jack, dropping the key into his pocket. "It may be of use to me some day."

The next day he was in the neighborhood of the Advertiser office, when there was an alarm of fire given.

A crowd quickly collected, and soon the street was thronged.

Suddenly, directly in front of him, he saw Jim, the dwarf, thrust his long, bony hand into the pocket of a man alongside.

In an instant Jack pounced upon him and seized his wrist as he was withdrawing his hand from the man's pocket.

"You let go!" snarled the dwarf, opening his hand and letting something fall to the ground.

Jack saw the act, saw some coins and a bright object fall to the pavement, recognized the person whose pocket Jim had picked, and recognized the thing that had fallen.

The man was Judge Elliott, and he turned as Jack suddenly stooped and picked up the object on the pavement.

It was a key.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Elliott.

Jim had suddenly wriggled away from Jack, and was now gliding through the crowd.

"That wretched dwarf was picking your pocket when I nabbed him," answered Jack. "Here is some of your property now."

He quickly stooped, picked up two or three coins, and, at the same time, took the key which Tom had given him from his pocket, and hastily compared it with the one he had picked up.

The keys were the same in design and make.

"Is that yours?"

"Yes."

Jack gave one key to the judge, keeping the other.

"I wonder how he came by it?" he thought.

CHAPTER XV.

JACK SUSPICIOUS OF ELLIOTT.

Shortly afterward the men who had attempted to rob the bank were put on trial and Tom Foster was called as a witness for the people.

Jack attended the trial in the interest of the Banner and followed the proceedings with the utmost care, for various reasons.

The lawyer for the defense tried to show that Tom may have been an accomplice, and let the robbers into the bank by way of the church, and had then become frightened and had given the alarm.

Tom flushed at this intimation and said:

"I was not the only one who had a key. You might as well accuse Mr. Evans of letting the men in."

Tom was cross-examined vigorously, but did not change his testimony in the least, although he was clearly greatly agitated at being subjected to such treatment.

Then the defense put on Bob and tried to make him implicate Tom, but the man did more benefit to the other side, and quite upset the smart lawyer's calculations.

The men were convicted and sentenced to State prison, the attorney for the defense giving notice of an appeal for a new trial.

At the close of the proceedings Jack left the court house by a private door, together with the lawyers and the judge,

thus getting rid of the trouble of making his way through the crowd.

On his way to the Banner office he saw Judge Elliott in his carriage stop and take up the lawyer for the defense and drive with him in the direction of the Elliott house.

It took Jack some time to get through with his business at the newspaper office, but at last he finished and set out for home.

It began to rain with great violence as he neared the railroad station, and hurriedly turning up his collar, he ran for shelter.

Two persons under one umbrella were entering the station as he got under the projecting roof in front of it.

"You did all you could to fasten the thing on the boy," Jack heard one of the men under the umbrella say.

"Yes, but their case was too strong for me. The boy himself stood the cross-examination splendidly."

The men entered the station, leaving Jack standing in thorough amazement.

He had no need to follow and see their faces to identify the two speakers.

One was Ezra Elliott, and the other was the lawyer who had defended the convicted burglars.

A train presently arrived, and in a few minutes Mr. Elliott came out of the station and entered his carriage, which stood near.

CHAPTER XVI.

LAZY JIM'S MISTAKE.

The winter months passed, spring came and Jack Foster was as busily at work as ever, doing all sorts of writing and seeming to do one as easily as another.

Mr. Barnes, of the Banner, offered him the editorship of the paper at a fair salary and he took it, the former editor of the paper giving all his time to the mechanical part of the business.

One day, in the early spring, Jack was busily writing, when his mother entered and asked:

"Is Billy here?"

"No. The young rascal has no taste for literary work. He may be with Tom studying how to keep books."

"He has not been home since morning, and I am really worried about him," said Mrs. Foster. "He doesn't always come home at noon, but school has been out two or three hours, and he is not here yet."

"He'll be in to supper," said Jack, lightly. "These runaway boys always return when they're hungry."

Billy had not returned when Jack got home, however, and more than that, Tom had not come in.

Jack began to be seriously anxious now, but he did not let his mother see that he was worried, but said that he would go and look for Tom and bring both boys home.

Jack left the house shortly afterward.

As he turned a corner he heard a shout, heard the sudden tramping of horses brought to a hasty stop, and saw someone fall.

"Look out where you're going!" called someone on a heavy truck.

Jack darted forward at the risk of slipping on the wet pavement and pulled a thick-set figure almost from under the feet of the horses.

"Oh, oh, I've broken my leg," wailed the person whom Jack had lifted to the sidewalk.

"Are you badly hurt?" asked Jack, supporting what he now recognized as Jim, the dwarf.

"My leg's broke," wailed Jim. "I slipped and the horses kicked me. Oh, oh, it pains me, oh, dear!"

Jack carried Jim into a neighboring drug store and laid

him on a settee, and the druggist telephoned for an ambulance. While waiting Jim said to Jack:

"You didn't go there, then, after all? You said you would."

"Go where?" asked Jack.

"You know where I told you, to the village on Bald Head, house with red blinds, where your little brother is."

"You never told me to go there."

"Yes, I did, over an hour ago. I met you down by Duffy's. I'm glad you didn't go now, 'cause the governor was laying for you. That was just a trap to get hold of you."

"And is Billy there?" asked Jack.

"Yes, but if you had gone alone you'd been nabbed. I'm glad you changed your mind and didn't go."

"Good Heaven, it was Tom he spoke to, and he has walked into a trap set for me," gasped Jack. "I must go there at once."

"What do you say?" muttered the dwarf in a whining tone. "It was Tom? Rats! Tom don't wear glasses and stoop."

"He does wear glasses and stooped to avoid the driving rain. You met him and thought it was I."

Then Jack turned to the druggist.

"Have him sent to the hospital or the police station," said Jack. "I've got work to do," and then he hurried out into the street, where it was more gloomy than ever.

"The village on Bald Head," he muttered, "house with red blinds. I suppose I can find it. I must go, and go alone. If I took assistance I should never find Billy, but would only alarm these evil wretches. Poor Tom! That's twice he's got into trouble on my account. Let me see—ah, I have it."

A sudden idea had occurred to Jack, and he began to think how he could carry it out.

In the guise of the dwarf he could safely visit the haunts of the gang on Bald Head and learn their secrets, and this he determined to do at once.

Stopping at two or three shops on the way, he hurried home as fast as possible.

There he disguised as Jim, the hunchback.

Leaving the house unobserved, he hurried to a livery stable on the edge of the town.

A few minutes later Jack sat in a corner of a carriage and was being driven rapidly toward Bald Head on a mission, the outcome of which he could only guess at.

The town was speedily left behind, and then a long stretch of open country was passed, then a small village, and at last Bald Head appeared, looming through the mist.

At the foot of the road leading up the mountain and to the little village Jack rapped sharply on the little window in front of him, opened the door, and shouted:

"Stop where you are! This is far enough!"

He handed up a bank bill to the driver, who reached down for it, and then Jack said:

"You go there and wait, and look after your horse. You needn't say anything about this to your boss. This is our own bargain. He, he, he!" and then Jack dashed off up the mountain road.

He began singing in a loud voice as he walked along, now and then indulging in a loud and boisterous laughter, as an intoxicated man will often do.

Presently a door was opened, a light flashed in his eyes, and a man stepped out, and said:

"Oh, it's you, is it, you crooked imp, making all this racket? Why don't you go to bed and keep quiet, instead of keeping honest folks awake?"

"Ho, ho, ho, that's good; honest folks is very good. Ho, ho! Say, seen the governor go to the house with red blinds? There's something on there. He, he, he!"

"Oh, there is, hey? I thought so when I saw you towing

young Foster's brother up here this evening. What's the game; to get Jack himself up?"

"Yes, and we've got him," chuckled the pretended dwarf. "Come and see the fun."

"So I will," and the man sprang inside, seized a cap, and came out again in a moment.

The boy assumed a staggering gait, and allowed the man to lead the way, which he did, taking Jack's arm at times and keeping him in the path.

"You must have had a good time by the crooked way you walk, Jim," he said. "Why, you'd have missed the path a dozen times if I hadn't looked out."

"Ho, ho, ho, yes, I've had a glorious time," and the disguised boy laughed uproariously. "It's a jolly good thing to get square on Jack Foster, and I've been celebrating it. Ho, ho, ho."

"Shut up, here we are," cried the man, seizing Jack, and knocking in a peculiar way upon a door in front of which he had paused.

The door was opened, and by the light which streamed out, Jack saw a low, squatty house of considerable size with dull red shutters to the windows.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Joe, and crooked Jim, too, hey? Come in. I wondered why Jim didn't fetch you before. We've got him again?"

"Got who?"

"Young Tom. We wanted Jack, but that fool Jim decoyed the wrong one."

"Didn't, neither; I got old four eyes himself," snarled the supposed Jim.

"Say you didn't," growled Dick, pushing his two visitors inside.

"Come on and I'll show 'em to you," and Dick pushed open a door at one end of the room walked across an inner room and paused before a low door in the opposite wall while he took a key from his pocket.

He and Joe followed Dick to a small, damp cellar, at the further end of which was another door which the man unlocked and threw open.

In a long, low-ceiled room, much larger than the main cellar, securely bound to rough benches, Jack saw his two brothers.

There was a long table in the room and also certain suspicious looking machines, besides a forge and a printing press, and Jack realized that the gang on Bald Head numbered counterfeiters as well as burglars among its members.

"Well, young fellows, we've come to pay you a visit," said Dick.

"There's that ugly hunchback that got me up here by lying and telling me Jack was here," said Billy. "I'd like to punch his dirty face."

"I only wish Jack was here, you hideous imp," said Tom, boldly. "He'd soon upset your wicked plans, you murderous villains!"

"Would he?" shrieked the supposed Jim, suddenly drawing a keen knife from his pocket and leaping toward Tom.

"It's I, Tom; keep up a good heart and I'll get you out of this yet," a familiar voice whispered in his ear, and he knew that Jack had once more risked his life to save him.

"Here, let them alone," cried the two men, springing forward. "The boss'll kill 'em, not you, you ugly imp."

Jack had already severed one of the stout cords which bound Tom to the bench, and trusted to being able to cut the rest before long.

"No funny business," said Dick. "You want to wait till the governor comes, and young Jack."

"Ho, ho! there'll be fun when you see Jack," chuckled the disguised boy. "He'll make things lively for you."

"Shut up!" cried Dick. "You make too much noise! Sh! listen! Isn't that his rap?"

"I'll go and see," said Joe, leaving the cellar hurriedly.

Jack stole over to the bench to which Tom was secured and cut the cords which bound him to it, as well as those which secured his limbs.

"Keep your arms at your sides," he whispered. "There's a knife on the bench. Free Billy when you can. I am armed."

"Here, keep away from there," shouted Dick, and Jack came forward as Joe entered, followed by a man wrapped in a long black cloak, which concealed even his face.

"Well, governor, there's been a slight mistake," said Dick.

"We've got Tom instead of Jack."

"Well, can't you lure him here the same way you got Tom?" demanded the cloaked figure, angrily.

Jack started in surprise, but luckily he was in a shadow, and was not observed.

The man threw off his cloak and stood in the full light.

Jack no longer had any doubt as to the identity of the leader of the gang on Bald Head.

The man was Ezra Elliott.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

Tom Foster was more surprised than Jack, for he knew nothing of the suspicions against Judge Elliott, and considered him the most upright and the most respected man in all the town, and the seeing of him in the hiding-place of the robbers was a most startling revelation.

"Well, you stupid," the man said, turning to Jack, "so you got the wrong one here, did you? You want to get the other one here as soon as you can."

"Somebody else can do it," said Dick, "somebody that won't make mistakes."

"Whom have you got?" asked Elliott. "Since that meddling fool Jack Foster has been at work we have lost many of our best men. Stover, Frank, Bill, Bob, and a lot more are in jail, the cave is shut up and the police are more active. I think we'd better go somewhere else. All our jobs lately in this region have failed. How about the queer business? Do you think we can work it?"

"Yes, if you can get us some good bills. You're a director and can easily do it. I say, how about making some on your own bank? That'll feather all our nests."

"That's good, but first we want to see about this business. As long as you've got Tom here he's got to go. If he lives there's an end to my secret."

"That's all right," laughed Dick, hoarsely. "We don't stop at murder. If the trees and stones around Bald Head could speak, they could tell many a tale of bloody deeds that you and I have had a hand in, Ezra."

"Enough of that," said Elliott. "Let me see the boys."

Jack sprang before him and whispered to Tom:

"Is it all right?"

"Yes."

"Then stand by me when I give the word."

"What are you doing?" demanded Elliott, angrily. "Get out of the way, you ugly beast."

"You're an ugly beast yourself, and an old hypocrite in the bargain," said Billy.

The man colored, clenched his fist and was about to strike the boy when Jack sprang in front of him.

"Stop!" he cried in ringing tones, leveling a pistol at Elliott's head.

"Who are you?" gasped the man.

Jack threw off his padded coat, straightened up to his full height and answered:

"I am Jack Foster, the boy whom you have tried to ruin

and whose life you now seek. If you oppose my escape I shall publish to the world every word I have heard to-night, and let everyone know what a miserable impostor you have been."

"Upon him!" hissed Elliott. "He is only one against three of us."

Then Tom and Billy leaped to their feet, the former with a knife and the latter with an iron bar that he had snatched from the table.

"What in the mischief does this mean?" cried Elliott. "Are you a traitor too, Dick?"

"Stand back!" cried Jack, advancing. "It means that your plans have failed, Ezra Elliott, and that I know your secret."

"That ugly imp Jim has gone back on us," growled Joe. "I never was for trusting him. I believe he put the boy onto us in the first place."

In an instant the three boys were between the door and their enemies.

The three men paused, irresolutely, and Jack continued:

"The first one who raises an alarm dies. Make for the door, Tom. Billy, get the light."

"Stop," said Elliott. "You are going to let the world know what I am, are you? You'd better find out what your own father was, first."

"What do you mean?" gasped Jack.

"I mean that your father lived on the proceeds of blackmail."

"It is a lie!" muttered Jack.

"It is the truth. Blackmail was his trade, his profession. So, if I am an impostor, what was he?"

"What my father was is nothing to me. I have nothing to do with his sin," said Jack. "Come, boys."

The three made a dash for the door, and were out of it in an instant.

The key was still in the lock, and with the rapidity of lightning Tom closed the door and locked it.

The three dashed across the small cellar and up-stairs in a twinkling.

Tom locked the cellar door, and then they quickly left the house, Jack in the lead.

The village was dark and still, as the boys hurried through its narrow streets and out upon the main road.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WARNING.

The boys had just reached the main road leading down the mountain, when they heard a loud explosion, and saw a tongue of flame shoot up from some point in the village they had just left.

"What do you suppose caused it?" asked Tom.

"I don't know. They may blown up the cellar in order to escape. There was no gunpowder that I could see, but there may have been other explosives."

"It would be a good thing if the lot of them were killed," said Billy.

"Ah, here we are to the hotel. Wait till I hunt up that driver. Stay right here and don't get lost," said Jack.

He returned in about ten minutes with a closed carriage.

"Here they are," they heard him say. "It's all right. Drive us back to town and I'll give you an extra fare."

"You ain't Jim the dwarf," said the man. "What's happened to him?"

"I'm the same Jim you took up. The real Jim is in the hospital with a broken leg." Then off they went.

The next day Jack went to the hospital to see how the dwarf was getting along with his broken leg.

On the way he met the man who had driven him to Bald Head the night before.

The man beckoned to him, got down from his box, and said:

"You're one of the young fellows, but I don't know which. That was a bad fire last night in the mountain village. Did you start it?"

"No."

"Well, that's good for you, because two men were killed and maybe more. I know of two. There was an explosion of some kind."

At the hospital he found Jim doing well and pleased to see him, the visit being entirely unexpected.

"Jim," said Jack, "you told me once to go to the brown hut on Bald Head and find out how my father made his money. Do you know how he made it?"

"Yes," said the dwarf.

"Was it by bleeding Elliott and others and threatening to inform upon them? Was it blackmail?"

At first Jim would not answer, but at last, being pressed, he said:

"That was it and I wanted you to know first, because I thought you was proud and lazy and I was goin' to take down yer spirit and laugh at you. Now, I wouldn't do it, 'cause I know you ain't proud and have got the right stuff in you. Oh, if I hadn't been brought up a thief, I might ha' been different, but now there's no chance."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Jack. "Don't get discouraged. There's a chance for everybody."

That same day Jack met Ezra Elliott on the street near the bank, looking as respectable and dignified as he always had.

"Dick tried to blow open the place last night," he said simply. "I am the only one left. If you are wise you will say nothing about what you heard. Nobody will believe you, while I could ruin your whole life by repeating what I know, so you'd better keep quiet."

"Ezra Elliott, it is not for me to ask terms of you, but quite the reverse," said Jack, firmly.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BRAVE FIGHT.

The boy called on Kitty Elliott the next day and asked to see her on important business.

When she came into the parlor looking more charming than ever, Jack said:

"Kitty, I have long desired to ask you a question, the answer to which will influence my future more than anything. I am now in a position to think of marrying, for while I am not rich, I earn a good income and my prospects are very bright. Will you some day be my wife?"

"No," said Kitty. "Do you think that I would marry a man whose father lived by extorting money from others? Your father was a blackmailer. For years he bled the men on Bald Head. They have confessed it to my father, who, as a judge, could receive their confidences. No, I will never marry a man whose father was such a wretch."

He left the house as if in a daze, but he presently remembered that he had not said a word against Mr. Elliott, and was glad that he had not.

In cleaning the house, a week or so later, Mrs. Foster, putting the garret in order and making room for things she did not want on the lower floors, came across a tin box containing papers.

These she began to examine.

A few minutes later she went into Jack's room, white and faint, put the box on his desk, and said:

"Jack, for Heaven's sake explain these papers. I hope I may be wrong, but to me they seem like the evidences of your father's guilt."

Jack began looking over the papers, and at once saw that his mother was right.

The papers were indeed the evidences of Mr. Foster's guilt, and the most indisputable ones.

He thereupon told his mother of his various adventures upon Bald Head, and how he had, little by little, learned of his father's misdeeds, until he had finally been assured of them by evidence that he could not disclaim.

A prying servant had seen Mrs. Foster enter Jack's room and had listened at the door, hearing all that was said.

She could not keep her secret, but told it to one and another who told others till at last many of the boarders came to Mrs. Foster and gave up their rooms, saying that they could not remain with a woman whose husband had such an evil reputation as hers had.

The mischief did not extend to the Fosters alone, for the Elliotts were concerned in it, and it soon got to be public talk that Judge Elliott was an impostor, a disgrace to the bench and a fit occupant of a prison cell.

Then the storm broke. Lazy Jim, Bob Stover and others all came out with confessions implicating Elliott and proving him to be a fraud and an impostor of the worst kind.

The man fled at the first sign of danger, but showed his dastardly nature by making public what he knew concerning Foster.

He escaped a prison and disappeared utterly, leaving his family dependent on the charity of others.

Jack preserved the same dignified conduct through all the trouble that he had always shown.

He uttered no word of scandal against the Elliotts, although some thought that he would have been justified in doing so.

This line of conduct forced people to respect and admire him, and by no slow process he soon recovered all his old friends, and secured many others.

In two years he had established a lasting reputation as a journalist and playwright, money poured in upon him in a golden stream, his work was in demand on all sides, and there was not a more popular man in all the town, young as he was.

The old house was sold and a new one bought.

Phil finished his college life brilliantly, and is now a professor of languages. Tom is cashier of a bank and expects to be president, Billy is at the head of a big business house in New York and Susie, who has spent many years abroad, is an artist of recognized ability.

Jack Foster is now well known, and enjoys the fruits of a splendid reputation.

After Jack came of age he asked Kitty Elliott to reverse her decision of two years before, and after considerable deliberation she did so and is now his wife, while Ned Elliott claims Susie Foster as his life companion, and so ends the story of MY BROTHER JACK.

Next week's issue will contain "THE BOY CLIFF CLIMBERS; or, THE MYSTERY OF THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN," by Berton Bertrew.

SPECIAL NOTICE. All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 45 to 51, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 79, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 91, 92 to 94, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 109 to 111, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 132, 139, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 192, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 277 294. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

AN IRON-BOUND KEG

OR,

THE ERROR THAT COST A LIFE

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG

(CHAPTER X—Continued)

"Orright. But say, boss, le's tie it to ther dock."

"It is safe enough here, Slob."

"Mebbe! but it's bad luck."

"Superstition!"

"P'raps. Anyway I don't like dem t'ings."

"Pull up your anchor, then."

"Butsey, hist up dat rock."

Butsey complied, and as Slob rowed the boat to the spiles the corpse was towed after it, Ned holding the line.

It was quite dark in the shadow of the spiles, and Ned found a rusty ring stapled to one of the spiles.

He tied the rope to it, and then pulled on it to drag the body over to the dock, when he found that it was caught on something floating in the water.

"What is that holding it back, Butsey?" he asked.

"I dunno," growled the gloomy man.

"Pull the boat over to it and see."

"Lemme do it," said Slob. "That ere Butsey ain't good fer nuffin' but ter set there an' grunt—dat's all."

He caught hold of the line fastened to the corpse and dragged the boat to the body by pulling on the line.

When the skiff ranged alongside of the floating corpse he bent over the gunwale and saw that it was a small piece of joist that held the body where he was.

The wood was half submerged, and as he stooped over and seized hold of it he found that a piece of rope was fastened to it leading down under the river.

"Hullo!" said he. "What's dis?"

"A buoy," said Ned, grasping it.

"Dat's a fack. Looker, Butsey?"

"The weight of the rope submerged it," said Ned.

"Yair," replied Slob. "Now see, der body is free agin."

"What can this buoy be fastened to?"

"Fish-net, mebbe."

"I am going to haul it up and see."

"Ah, what's der use? We wanter fish fer de iron-boun' keg."

"It will only take a moment, boys," persisted Ned.

He pulled on the line, but found that there was a tremendous weight on the other end of the rope.

Still the heaviest weights are buoyant in salt water, and this one gradually ascended to the surface as Ned pulled, the skiff keeled over until the water threatened to pour over the gunwale, and Butsey and Slob gazed on curiously.

"Must be a ship anchored at the other end," panted Ned.

"Lor', it's heavy! Want me ter loan yer a lift?"

"No. I can manage it alone, Slob."

"Look out yer don't go overboard," cautioned Butsey.

Just then the rope was all drawn into the boat, and the ob-

ject Ned was hauling came up to the surface, and remained there in plain view.

It was the iron-bound keg!

Ned was so astonished that he almost let it fall back.

"Why," gasped he, "look! Here it is, boys!"

"By gosh!" said Slob. "He's got it."

"Now you can lend me a hand."

"Better row it over ter der dock; de boat might upset."

"That's a good plan. Go ahead."

They pulled the boat back to the spiles, and Ned held the keg up to the surface until they came to the dock.

Then Butsey and Slob got up on the stringpiece with the rope attached to the keg, and hauled it up.

It was safely landed on the dock, and the corpse pulled up beside it and laid on the rough planks.

"Your work is done," said Ned to the two men.

"I ain't sorry fer dat," said Slob.

"Here is the five dollars I promised you."

He handed a bill to the water man, who said:

"An' it's mighty easy earned, hey, Butsey?"

Butsey grunted his reply.

"Will you go and summon the morgue wagon and a cab for me?"

"Sure," said Slob, readily. "An' you git der boat ready, Butsey, while I'm garn—d'yer hear, ole feller?"

Butsey grunted again and Slob went away.

Ned sat down upon the keg, and glanced at the stiff and bloated figure of the dead bank burglar, while Butsey climbed down into his skiff again.

"Grace's unfortunate father!" muttered Ned, with an involuntary shudder. "Such a cruel fate! Sam Bull must have carried the body out of that vault, flung it into the sewer, and it evidently has drifted down to the river, where it sunk."

His solution of the mystery was a correct one.

Ned saw that the body had not been tampered with since the last time he beheld it, nor had it been in the river long, else the fishes would have devoured the flesh to the bones in places.

The keg was very heavy, and he wondered what its contents could be to occasion Sam Bull such trouble.

"When he flung it in the river, it was not done to get rid of it," he thought. "Oh, no. He would not have put that buoy on it if he did not intend to find it again, for he is a regular sharper."

Just then a man came out from behind a mooring spile on back of Ned, and tip-toed his way toward the detective.

He was Sam Bull, and he had seen all that transpired at the end of the dock, although he did not hear a word of what passed between the men.

Nor did he recognize Ned, disguised as he was. In fact, he firmly believed that the young officer and Grace were then on the ocean, taking a forced trip to Europe. The little wretch had been horrified, though, to see the body of the bank burglar and the iron-bound keg hauled out of the river.

It made him reckless with desperation. He imagined that one boatman had gone away in the skiff, and the other had gone ashore, leaving Ned alone on the dock with the body and the keg.

With the soft stealth of a cat he crept up behind Ned and as he got in arm's reach of the detective, he sprang forward, caught him by the neck with both hands and rushed him to the edge of the dock.

And with one fling he sent the officer over into the river into which he sunk with a splash.

The attack had been so sudden that Ned was taken completely by surprise, and did not know who assailed him.

The moment Sam was rid of the detective, he was startled to see the cab which Slob had sent for Ned come running out on the pier toward him.

"Are you the one who sent for the cab, sir?" asked the driver of Sam, as he reined in.

A thrill of joy passed over the hunchback. Fortune was unexpectedly favoring him.

"Cab? Yes—ay, ay. This way!" he cried, exultantly. The man alighted, and pointed at the corpse.

"Do you think I'm going to carry that thing?" he demanded.

"By the powers, no! It is only me and this keg."

"Oh, that is different!"

"I've sent for the dead wagon for that body."

"By the boatman who engaged me?"

"Ay, ay, by that man."

"I'll charge you double fare for that keg."

"All right. Lend me a hand to put it in the cab."

Sam and the driver lifted the keg into the vehicle, and then the dwarf jumped in himself, and cried:

"Take me with all speed to Hester and Allen streets."

"All right, sir," said the driver.

"Don't stop for anything or anybody."

"Of course not."

"I'll pay you five dollars for this."

"That settles it. Gee-up!"

He started his horse, and the cab dashed away to the street, leaving the corpse alone upon the dock.

Sam thought the three men were ordinary rivermen, and chuckled when he thought how cleverly he had wrested the keg away from them just when they were on the point of carrying it away.

Just as the cab rattled out in the street from the dock, Slob and a policeman appeared ahead of it.

The boatman yelled something to the driver, and Sam looked out an open window and shouted to the man:

"Go on, go on! Don't stop for them!"

Slob looked at the hunchback in amazement.

"Gosh! Where did he come from?" he gasped.

"Who is he?" the policeman asked.

"I dunno! He's in the carriage that I hired fer my friend."

The cabman had a visionary five dollar bill before his eyes, and whipping up his horse, he sent the animal flying through the street past the policeman and the boatman, intent upon earning the money.

A moment later the vehicle vanished around a corner.

The boatman was thoroughly amazed.

He glanced down the dock and saw no one.

"Gosh! This is queer!" said he, in alarmed tones.

"What's the matter now?" the officer asked.

"My two frien's is garn."

"Maybe they are down in the boat."

"That's so. Come on; we'll see."

They ran out to the end of the dock, then.

"Is this the body?" the patrolman asked.

"Yair. But ther keg is garn, too,"

"Strange. Ah—listen! What's that splashing?"

They ran to the stringpiece and peered down at the water.

The boat was moored there yet, but Butsey was not in it.

But he was in the river.

Holding Ned Riggs up.

The grumpy individual had seen Sam send Ned flying heels over head over the moored skiff into the river.

He did not know whether Ned could swim or not, and as he was a veritable water rat himself, he jumped up on the spur of the moment and took a header into the river after the detective to save him from drowning.

Ned had been carried far out in the slip, and was able to take care of himself when he recovered his wits, but he was suddenly taken with cramps and had to call to Butsey for assistance.

It was just as the waterman was assisting him to the boat that Slob and the policeman appeared on the stringpiece.

Butsey helped Ned to get into the boat, and the officer immediately got over the pains that racked his limbs.

"Who the deuce flung me into the river?" he growled.

"Not me," vouchsafed Butsey gloomily.

"I know you didn't! How could you when you were in the boat?"

"Dere's Slob an' er cop on der dock."

"It must have been your friend."

"Naw. I don't believe it wuz."

"Well, I'll go up and see."

"Lemme boost yer."

"No. I can get up. I'm much obliged for helping me."

Ned heard Butsey grunt something, and then he climbed up on the dock where Slob accosted him with:

"Wat wuz der matter, sir?"

"Did you throw me in the river?"

"Why, no. Me an' dis cop jist came here."

"Is that so?" asked Ned in amazement.

"That's the truth," the policeman corroborated.

"Well, I'm rattled!" exclaimed Ned in perplexity.

"Did some one chuck you in?"

"Bodily. But where is the keg?"

"I jest missed it myself," said Slob, soberly.

"This is mighty strange."

"Who wuz der feller wot rid away in der cab I sent?"

"What cab—what fellow?"

"Why, der ugly-faced feller wid der hunchback, der big head, bushy eyebrows, an' der big hooked nose."

"Sam Bull, by jingo! Where was he?"

"Muster been on dis dock."

"Then he flung me in and has stolen the keg."

"Dat's my idea. Hey, Butsey! Oh, he ain't here!"

"And he was in a cab?"

"Ridin' away in der cab I sent fer you."

"This beats me. Events have transpired fast."

"What does all this mean, anyway?" the policeman asked.

Ned told him enough to satisfy him, and in few moments later the morgue wagon appeared.

The body was put in the vehicle, and after Ned explained the case to the driver the wagon rolled away.

"Where did you find the cab, Slob?" asked Ned.

"Goin' along der street, sir."

"Could you identify it again?"

"I reckon I could. It wuz marked enough."

"Marked! How?"

"Gosh! der horse was a pure white one, an' der kerridge

had a great big hole stove inter der box on der right side over der hind wheel."

"That will do. I'll keep a watch for that rig. I must learn where that keg was taken to. You can go now, boys."

The two boatmen then entered the skiff and rowed away, promising to say nothing about what had happened.

Ned then went over to the street with the policeman.

He was thoroughly disgusted.

"I've got the body for the coroner, though!" he reflected with some satisfaction, "and that is one point in my favor. Once let me find the cabman and he will tell me where he brought that keg if I pay him for his information."

He parted company with the policeman at the first corner he came to and went down-town.

It was very evident to him that Sam Bull had the keg again in his possession, and the detective felt a little timid that Sam might have seen his face, and now knew that he had escaped back to New York from the ocean steamer—but he was mistaken.

It struck him that the likeliest place to which the hunchback would take the keg would be his own house, and he started down for Hester street.

"He put it in the river for safe keeping," he thought, "never imagining anybody would think of looking there for it at the mouth of the sewer, and now that he is aware that it has been found I would not be surprised if the rascal should open it and abstract its contents."

If this was done Ned had but little hope of ever finding out what was in the iron-bound keg.

"Perhaps, if I hurry up," thought the detective, "I may get there soon after Sam and catch him with the keg. Anyhow, here is a cab and I'll hire it and run my chances."

So he hailed the passing vehicle, got in and was whirled down to Hester street.

Then he pounded at Tom's door, but the hunchback did not answer the summons.

One of the front windows was unlocked, and without the least hesitation the detective went through it into the front room.

A rapid search through the house failed to show any signs of the dwarf or the keg, and the detective went down in the cellar and looked around with no better result.

In sheer disgust he gave up the search and went out into the street again, leaving the house so that Sam would not know any one had been in there ransacking it from top to bottom.

Where to look next the detective did not know. He walked down to the corner, and saw a cab come running toward him.

The driver was staring hard at Sam's house as he went by it, and the detective saw that his horse was white, and a hole was broken in the body of the vehicle on the right hand side over the hind wheel.

"By jingo! there is the very carriage Slob described to me as having contained the hunchback," muttered the detective as his glance fell on it.

He ran out in the street.

"Hold on there!" he shouted to the driver.

The man started, peered hard at him, and then, instead of obeying, he suddenly whipped up his horse and drove furiously up to the detective.

"He suspects me—he wants to escape me!" the detective muttered. "But by heavens he won't do it if I can help it!"

And as the horse dashed up to him he sprang forward and seized hold of the reins at the bit.

all his might, for the driver was goading the poor beast on with the cruel whip.

It finally came to a pause, however.

The animal was sweating and panting from its great exertion, and reared up several times, threatening to throw off the detective's clutch, and leave him again.

But when the driver saw that further resistance was useless, he calmly submitted to his fate.

"What are you holding my horse up that way for?" he growled in angry tones, as he slackened the reins.

"You will see in a moment!" Ned replied.

He let go the reins, climbed up on the shaft, and going up to the driver, he sat down on the seat beside the man in a way that showed the man he was not trifling.

"This is pretty cheeky of you!" exclaimed the hackman.

"Not in the least, as this will show you," replied Ned, exhibiting the new badge he had procured.

"Oh! You are a detective in disguise!"

"I am, and you are my prisoner, sir."

"Your prisoner? What for?" asked the man in alarm.

"For aiding a criminal to rob and escape me."

"I didn't do anything of the sort."

"Yes, you did, upon pier No. — to-night."

"See here—two witnesss saw you and are willing to swear to the identity of your rig, so don't try to deny it any more, or I'll pull you right in."

"Then tell me what the row is about."

"Will you own up to having carried away an ugly little hunchback and an iron-bound keg from the pier I just mentioned to you?"

"Suppose I did?"

"Didn't you bring him down to this street?"

"Suppose I did."

"Then tell me where you left him."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you'll be as deep in the mud as he is in the mire."

"What has he done?"

"I have told you already."

"I think you had better arrest me, sir."

"Don't be a fool!"

"Go on; arrest me. You can't prove anything against me."

"Very well. Drive on down to Mulberry street."

The man snapped his teeth savagely, whipped up his horse, and drove over to Canal street.

He kept thinking hard for some time, and turned his horse westward, Ned never saying a word.

The silence of the detective began to make him feel uneasy.

Then he began to weaken.

Reining in his horse to a walk, he suddenly said:

"Say—look here, young feller."

"Well—what do you want?"

"Suppose I acknowledge all you said, what then?"

"If you do as I ask of you, I'll let you go."

"Honor bright?"

"You have my word for it."

"Then I'll confess."

"Just as you like."

"I was summoned by a boatman to go to the dock, and a hunchback did meet me there. I didn't see any one else around but him, so of course I imagined he was the one who wanted me. There was a corpse lying on the dock beside a small iron-bound keg, and the little man and the keg were put in the carriage, and I soon drove them away. We came down to this street, and he went in that house over there, and came out with a valise. Then he got in the cab again, and we went down to the ferry."

"Which ferry?"

(This story to be continued in our next issue.)

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCUSATION.

The flying horse dragged Ned Rings along with it a dozen paces despite the fact that the detective clung to the bit with

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